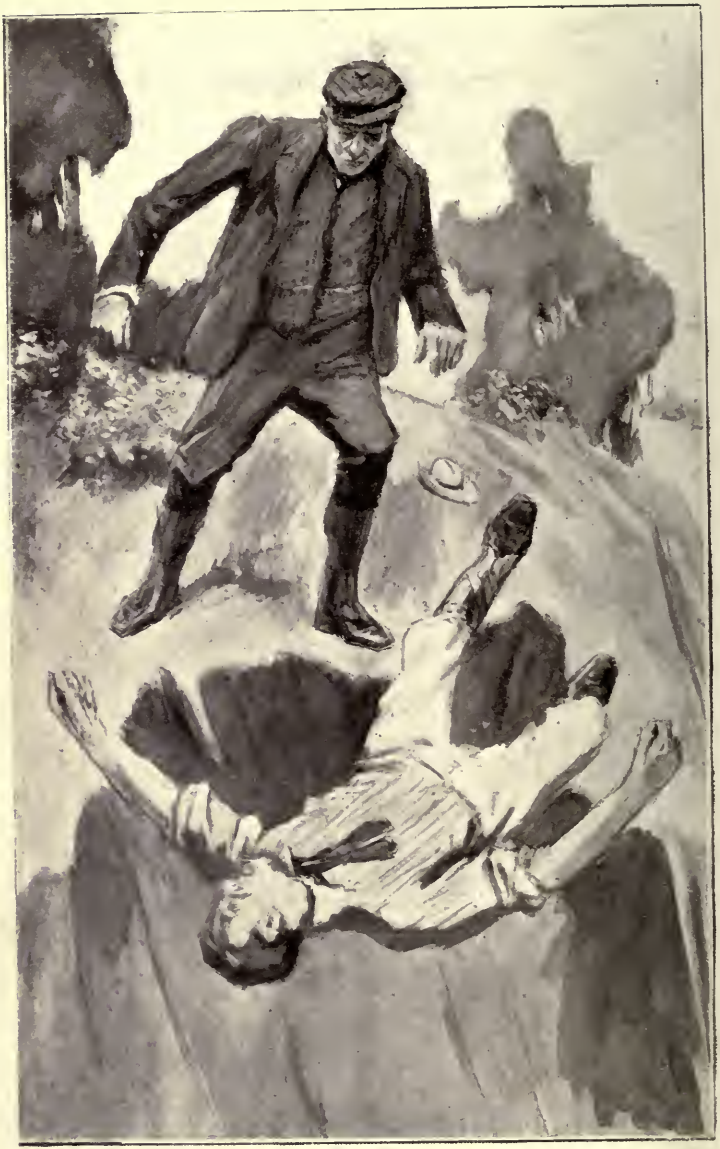
fornia
nal
y

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/catherinehoreton00sabeiala

CATHERINE HORETON.



"WHICH CAUSED HARRY TO STUMBLE AND FALL OFF THE ROCK."

# CATHERINE HORETON

AN AUSTRALIAN STORY

BY

W. SABELBERG

Illustrated by Albert Enes

*"Ignorantia Legem non Excusat" is a Legal maxim. That it is equally true of Ethics was unknown to the people of this book, or their story might never have been written.*

Melbourne :
C. O. PETERSEN
1907

PRINTED BY
C. O. PETERSEN,
444 LITTLE COLLINS STREET,
MELBOURNE, VICTORIA.

S113c

# CATHERINE HORETON.

## PROLOGUE.

Three men, named Smith, Horeton, and Johnston, were seated one sunny day on the verandah of a small weather-board house. They were talking in quiet tones, but concentrated, on the part of Smith, by fiercely-held anger, and looking persistently into the face of Horeton, who was sullenly staring at the quiet bush. But his brows were puckered, his face white and set with purpose. Johnston was looking from the face of one to that of the other, his eyes glittering, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously.

At the sunny end of the verandah two little girls were playing. One was about four years of age—a clear-skinned, red-headed maiden, in whose unformed features and erect, quick-moving little body was the promise of great beauty. The other was a chubby little maid of two and a half, fair-haired and bright-eyed, nursing a rag doll. They were Kate and Helen respectively.

From the interior of the house came the whimper of a baby, accompanied by the rythmic rumble of a cradle, and the low crooning of a lullaby. Occasionally the children ceased playing to gaze at the men, vaguely uneasy at some tone that revealed their anger; then child-like forgetting it in the greater interest of the doll.

Yet the effect of the quarrel between the men was to influence their whole lives. Through it all whimpered the baby, and the cradle softly rumbled.

The three men had become acquainted on the voyage to Australia, gone to the goldfields together, failed to make a fortune, taken to manual labour on the roads,

saved enough to take small contracts, and later large ventures. At present they were partners in a big railway contract. Now they were quarrelling—Smith and Johnston on one side, Horeton on the other.

The three men had seemed made for each other. Smith had developed a fine gift for managing men; Johnston, originally a London mechanic, as fine a gift for figures; while Horeton had the commercial foresight that enabled him to foresee the trend of prices. Each was a leg in the tripod on which they had built their success; each was necessary to the others—till one found he could stand alone.

They had come to the colony with the intention of becoming farmers, which had been the occupation of Smith and Horeton in England. Johnston desired a farm, too, because it had been the occupation of his ancestors for generations. But he also was a dreamer, inclined to want of balance in success and failure, and steadied only by the stronger personality of Smith.

After working together for fifteen years their ideas of what constituted a farm had considerably enlarged, and altered from agriculture to grazing. Five years before, the Government had thrown open for selection a number of leaseholds held by squatters, when Horeton discovered a method of getting a number of selections together—it was copied from the methods used by the squatters themselves—and formulated a scheme, which his partners instantly adopted. It was simply that Horeton would take up a selection, and dummy as many others as he could. It had proved costly, but his partners had handed over to him all their available capital, and now he had the titles of fifteen thousand acres clear, with six thousand acres still under the process of dummying. They had agreed to acquire 21,000 acres before dividing. In six months more the contract would be finished. Smith and Johnston had asked for an immediate division of the land. Horeton had refused by saying that they had not acquired the 21,000 acres agreed upon, and beyond that refused to explain.

"How long will it require to get the final 6,000 acres?" asked Johnston.

"At least two years; some of it three."

Watching him very closely, Smith then asked—

"Will you divide then, Horeton?" It was only a fraction of a second that the answer was delayed; but long enough to give form to a shadowy suspicion in Smith's mind.

"Of course I will." But he over-emphasised his words.

"I'm sick of contracting," said Johnston, "and want my share now."

"I'm sick of it, too, and there was nothing in our agreement binding us to the exact 21,000 acres," said Smith.

"I'm not satisfied with only five thousand," said Horeton, obstinately.

"Will you be satisfied with 7,000?" asked Smith, quickly. Horeton detected the distrust of his tone, and did not answer. The cradle rumbled insistently, and the baby whimpered. The two little girls were pretending the doll was asleep, and were quiet.

"For the last time, Horeton—will you divide?"

"No."

"There is nothing for it then but legal proceedings." For one brief moment a look of triumph flashed across Horeton's eyes.

"You're beginning to threaten," he said, quietly. This time he turned and looked into his partner's eyes.

"It is all that is left. You're breaking our agreement in spirit, if not in the letter."

"I don't like being threatened," said Horeton. "And what's more, I won't stand it." Smith's expression made him look dangerous, and his jaw set. Johnston sprang to his feet.

"You're a liar and a rogue, Horeton, and every penny we've paid you'll have to repay."

"I won't stand that language from any man. You may make me, if you can," said Horeton, still quietly. Smith knew him well enough to understand he would not have said that without some reason.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Exactly what I say. The land is all in my name, and you can recover nothing. It's a matter of law."

"Then you defy us?"

"You compel me to." He turned deathly white as he said it.

"How long have you known this side of the question?" asked Smith.

"From the first selection I took up."

"And you never told us we were walking into a legal trap?"

"It—it was no trap—till you began to use threats."

"You foresaw—this." Horeton was silent. Smith rose. He was over six feet in height, broad shouldered, with hands made large and heavy by toil. Horeton seemed to shrink into his chair. Before Smith could take a step, Johnston sprang forward, and struck Horeton on the side of the head. With a quick turn, Smith seized and held him before he could repeat the blow, and in controlling him controlled himself. The two children stared wonderingly, the cradle still rocked, but the baby's whimper had risen to a wail.

"You're disturbing my child," said Horeton, wiping some blood from his cheek. He spoke quietly, as usual; but there was a stridence in his tone now that showed the quarrel was final.

"Curse your child. It's to have the land some day, perhaps; but may it be a curse to him, and to you. If there is any justice on earth, it will never be anything else but a curse to you and yours." Smith led him to the gate, urging him to be quiet. "Like a dog you got it: may it turn on you like a dog." Still fuming, Smith led him out.

. . . . . .

Smith went straight to a leading lawyer for an opinion. It was perfectly clear when given. Every form of partnership for the acquisition of selections was absolutely null and void* The purpose of the Act was to place as many men on the land as there were 320 acre blocks. The lawyer knew the law was being broken, at great financial risk, all over the colony; and told them, what Horeton had never told them, what heavy risks Horeton had run till the three years' residence and improvement

*Portens v. Eddy—1 V. L.R. Equity, 148.
Chambers v. Chambers, 2 V. L.R. Equity, 179

conditions had been observed. "Any one of his dummies at the end of the three years could have defied him as he has defied you. All he might get is, perhaps their stock and implements, over which, of course, he would have taken liens; even got them to make wills."

"Then we have no redress?" said Smith.

"None whatever."

"What about the money we have advanced?"

"That goes, too. You might as well have thrown it into the sea. Why didn't you consult a lawyer before entering into such an agreement?"

"We trusted him absolutely, because he was a friend," said Smith.

The lawyer watched him leave with looks expressive of pity and disgust, and, shrugging his shoulders at their pitiable ignorance, began disentangling the affairs of some other client.

. . . . . .

Of the three partners, Smith had been the first to marry. His wife was the daughter of one of his foremen, an Oxford Fellow and a wastrel in England, a navvy in Australia, by name of Anstey. Mrs. Anstey was the daughter of a storekeeper, whose two daughters inherited from their mother good, clean blood, which strengthened the higher but terribly weak fibre of the father. Smith worshipped his wife, who died a week after the birth of her son. Smith transferred his worship to the son, and pleaded for his sister-in-law to take charge of him; then buried his grief in hard work. It was his love for the boy that saved him from moral breakdown after Horeton's treachery.

Johnston never recovered from the blow. He had married a farmer's daughter, who behaved like a heroine, and thought she was nothing but commonplace; for in six months from the quarrel with Horeton, Johnston was a hopeless drunkard, and the whole burden of completing the contract fell on Smith's shoulders.

When it was finished, he tendered successfully for another. Before it was quarter finished he realised the loss he had suffered in losing his partners. It was an utter failure, and swallowed the last penny of his capital. He

went right to the bottom of the ladder, and began climbing again, working manfully to acquire the qualities he had lost in his partners, and, after all, found his particular gift for managing men the essential.

He did not lose sight of Johnston; but made him work when he could keep him sober, and when he could not, supported his wife and her two boys. At the age of ten the younger died. Grief drove the father to a mad drinking bout, in which he brutally treated the elder, and ended in real madness and the lunatic asylum. The elder boy ran away. Smith did all in his power to recover him, and learnt that he had gone to sea. It was the last Smith ever heard of him. To the mother he granted an annuity, and when she died put it aside for the father during his lifetime, and the boy afterwards, in case he should turn up again.

His own son Jim was at college by this; then he gave up contracting for banking, and grew wealthier year by year.

His experience of Horeton's treachery created a deep feeling that ignorance was the cause of his undoing, and he determined that his son should be ignorant of nothing he could learn, or of any knowledge that money could purchase. When Jim was 18, he purchased a large villa in Elsternwick and settled down. But still true to his resolve, sent Jim travelling, firmly believing that knowledge and education were one and the same thing.

Fortunately, Miss Anstey, whom Jim regarded as his mother, even when he learnt she was not, skilfully counteracted nearly everything his father had done to spoil him. She understood her brother-in-law thoroughly; honoured him for his love of her sister, his trust in her; and, above all, for his grit in pulling through the disaster that destroyed his partner. She knew nothing of the details of the rupture, and, like Smith himself, had almost forgotten Horeton; neither remembered him any longer with bitterness. They never mentioned his name to Jim, who grew up ignorant of evil in the concrete; though he knew of its existence, as he knew the shadow that followed him in the sunlight. Returning from a tour when he was twenty-one, Jim grew restless. He was the descendant of generations of workers, and his muscles

ached for use. His father laughed, and sent him away again. There was another reason for it. He foresaw the coming of the financial crisis of 1893, and wanted his boy away, for it was bringing another burden of anxiety and work to his strong shoulders. He did not foresee that the last burden was to crush him, though he saved his bank and fortune intact.

Then Jim returned, his heart high with vague longing, his eyes alight with the glow of youth, undimmed by experience, and gazing on a world without shadows.

## CHAPTER I.

A brilliant sun shone on the rain-washed streets of Melbourne. It was the middle of the spring. Overhead the sky was a deep, illimitable blue, except where here and there a great, white-edged bale of vapoury cloud fled before a cool southerly wind. Ladies were walking up and down Collins-street in the first of their spring attire, bright dashes of colour showing brilliantly against the neutral tinted buildings and pavements. The north side of the street was in shadow; the south side was aglare in the brilliant sunlight; the trees that lined the broad street had their black, wet-looking branches dotted with the vivid green of half-grown leaves. The Town Hall clock struck 12, scarcely heard above the clang of tram bells, and the rattle of heavy-laden carts along the block-paved roadway. Business men and clerks were leaving their stuffy offices for lunch. Each man as he emerged glanced upwards automatically at the attractive sky, and inwardly glowed to the glow without them; but only for a moment.

On the faces of the elderly men, the responsible heads of the great business houses, and on the faces of the younger men in the banks, there were still traces of the financial disaster. Those who had seen Melbourne before it saw the change more markedly if they had been absent during the crisis itself. Having returned two days before from the Continent, to Jim Smith the change was distinct and vaguely painful. Three years before all his acquaintances were talking of new enterprises in land, or the buildings they were about to erect or purchase; now they were grimly talking of what they hoped to save from the wreck. Young and old then were bright, now they were solemn and sad. It was only the feminine half and the children who seemed unchanged. Jim sauntered slowly down the street, nodding here and there to abstracted men, who nodded back casually, raising his hat in return to the bows of sundry ladies, who bowed

affably if elderly, and with gentle reserve if young. At least, so it seemed to him, and he inwardly wondered why so many elderly ladies with whom he was only slightly acquainted were so affable.

Having been where crowds were thicker, women just as pretty and cities larger, he felt as if he were a cosmopolitan, with ideas too broad for a small city on the corner of a continent which foreigners surprisedly thought was inhabited by blacks. Jim was only 23; was acquainted with theories, and a few principles of no practical application, and therefore only partly understood. He had been taught that broad ideas in science, art, and literature were the only parts of them worth possessing —and believed it; and when they were his, he was pretty much the same as before he found them. He had travelled extensively; but had met others who had travelled more, and to better purpose; he did not see that it was because they had a definite object in travelling. He had been taught to do nothing well; and when he looked at the men passing him, he saw purpose written in every face. It so depressed him that he thought he must have indigestion or a deranged liver. Never having felt the spur of necessity, he totally misunderstood it. He was merely an idle man, with nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in.

Balls and parties had palled long ago; smoke-nights were mere exhibitions of comically youthful imbecilities; yachting had only made him wet, and given him the trouble of thinking where he would sail, when there were only five places in the Bay to chose between. Of horses he had had what he wanted; while horse racing only looked like a game between fools and rogues.

The discomfort of being physically healthy, with nothing on which he could use his muscles, made him feel sick; for he had childish memories of illness which were always associated with discomfort, and he was sick with ennui. Which is one of the little ironies of having everything you wish by merely signing a cheque. Having exhausted all the possibilities of healthy pleasure—he was constitutionally averse to the unhealthy—he wept for new worlds to conquer, and found the Alexanders were commoner in private life than in history. The dif-

ference was in the ideas of what constituted a world. Then he hailed a hansom in disgust, and was driven home.

Arriving at the gate of his home in Elsternwick, he alighted and walked languidly up to the house. His aunt opened the door herself. There was an unusually solemn look in her eyes. He forgot his ennui instantly.

"What's the matter, mum?"

"Your father's ill; you had better go to him; he's in the dining-room. He took bad directly after lunch." Jim went through the library, and saw bundles of papers lying on the table. "Been overworking himself, I expect," he said to himself, and passed into the dining-room, where his father was sitting in an armchair. Mr. Smith's face was white and tired looking, his white hair unkempt, his long, white beard straggled across his breast, and his usually keen eyes dull and half closed; they opened and lighted when his son entered.

"I'm afraid I've overdone it, my boy, but it's nothing." He tried to say it cheerfully.

"Mum looked as if the servants had rebelled and looted the pantry," said Jim, brightly, trying to hide the inward shock at his father's appearance. His father laughed weakly. "Why on earth don't you let me give you a hand with those confounded papers, dad?"

"Why should you bother about them, my boy, when I can do it. It would take you too long to get the hang of them now, and I want you to enjoy yourself."

"I've done enjoyment to death. It's harder work than it seems, dad. How would you feel if you'd never had anything to do?" His father looked surprised.

"I really don't know; I don't remember ever being without some job or the other."

"I'm afraid you've spoilt me, dad. I feel dreadfully useless, and it's time you had somebody to give you a hand."

"It would have been all right if this financial breakdown hadn't come and doubled my work. I think I've finished, though, now, and will take a rest when this fit passes." His voice sank wearily.

"Seen the doctor?"

"No."

"I'll send for him." Jim rose and left the room.

Mum and Jim watched the doctor's inscrutable face anxiously. They were sitting in the room during his examination.

"You will have to take a rest, Mr. Smith, particularly a mental one. Now you are not to be bothered by any business on any account, and you're to go to bed at once." He took up his hat, and nodded to Jim almost imperceptibly to come out.

"How long has your father been like this?" he asked when out of hearing of the invalid. The doctor's face was very solemn.

"I only knew he was ill when I came in ten minutes ago," answered Jim.

"That looks bad. Has he been working very hard?"

"Not harder than usual, I think."

"To all appearances, I suppose; but he has been subject to some very heavy mental strain, and I'm sorry to tell you, Jim, his chance of pulling through is a mighty poor one indeed." Jim felt like fainting.

"You don't mean to say he's dying, do you?"

"I shall be able to tell you within a week. In the meantime, I shall keep him going on digitalis."

The week was to Jim a long-drawn-out terror. Hope elated him, only to be hunted by sickening fear; so that he scarcely knew whether he was himself alive or dead, and only vaguely knew his father was alive; while his efforts to be bright were pure mental agony. He was so absorbed with his own anxiety that he scarcely knew that his alert, always busy aunt was ever near him. Unobtrusively, she had so lightened his burden that he never knew how helpless he was in the sick room. It was part of his fate that when anything happened requiring quick decision and decisive action, there was always someone near him to decide and act for him. The doctor came more and more frequently, did his best to keep the old man from thinking about business; but in every recovery from a paroxysm of weakness, which left him panting, he insisted upon signing interminable documents, or dictating unending letters to his secretary, and persisted in saying it was only play. In fact, he knew he was dying; yet he was too strong to fear death, and he was dying as he had lived—

in harness. He worked right up to his first attack of delirium, in which he rambled brokenly about a farm in Dorset. Recovering from the first attack, he began to tell anecdotes about his mother. He seemed so sensible that Jim had another gleam of hope. The doctor gave the patient an opiate, which made him sleep heavily. When he wakened, the flame of his life flickered, then flared brightly. It was at midnight; the trees outside his unblinded windows were scintillating in the brilliant moonlight, and were so still as to appear to be listening —waiting for something. The old man watched them thoughtfully; then he sighed as they seemed to awaken some old memory, and, turning his eyes away, he signed to Jim to come and sit on the bed beside him.

"I think I have arranged everything, Jim, so that you will have little or no bother. But there are some papers concerning Johnston, my old partner—he went before me, poor chap—there's something I want you to do"—his eyes closed tiredly; he was silent for half a minute—"I can't think exactly what"—he spoke very slowly—"poor devil, his boy ran away. That's why I was never severe with you, Jim. Come a little nearer, my boy;" then, looking up at him quickly, he began to speak more rapidly, and said, "Always do what you want to, you'll find out soon enough if it's the wrong thing; but always find out for yourself. You'll fail mostly in what you undertake; but that's best too in the end, so don't mind failing; I mostly failed, but your own mistakes teach you better than the soundest advice. But I had you —after your mother—all dead." He was silent for a long time. Jim thought he was sleeping again, but "I'm going, too," he muttered, just as the doctor entered, followed by mum. The doctor looked instantly grave.

"Go and lie down," he said to Jim. Gently disengaging his hand from his father's, Jim rose and went into the library, where he began to pace sullenly, fretfully, and inwardly praying. A light gust of wind sighed sadly through the trees. Jim started and ran hastily back to the room. His father's life had gently fluttered out.

## CHAPTER II.

A fortnight later Jim and his aunt were sitting in the drawing-room talking in subdued tones. They had not yet recovered from the shock which had come to them so suddenly, and were talking in a manner which they tried to make casual; but the shadow of the old man still unconsciously coloured their thoughts, and directed the conversation in a circle which left him the unmentioned centre. Then they gradually began to speak of themselves and their own affairs. As his father had said, Jim had found everything foreseen and provided against his ever having any bother with his money. It had been invested and placed so skilfully, that all Jim had to do was draw the interest and leave the capital alone. His trustees were a big public company, with the most highly trained financial talent in its pay, which quickly showed Jim how painfully ignorant he was. But if he couldn't manage his financial affairs yet, there was nothing to prevent him learning, and at the same time getting an insight into the real meaning of life. He was getting restless again; only more so than formerly, as the death of his father gave him even cause to think of himself more seriously.

"I wonder when I shall be a man, Mummy? I feel so useless," he said, suddenly, swinging round to face her.

"Why, Jim, you're nearly six feet high, and quite grown up." Jim smiled rather wanly.

"I knew that three years ago, mummy, but I want to DO something. I don't care what it is. Why, I can't even go out and dig the garden without Jenkins looking at me with a supercilious grin." He rose and began to walk up and down the room, his invariable habit when he was really troubled. "I s'pose, if I went and took a job with the pick and shovel in the streets, I'd knock my head off, and be thought a lunatic, too."

"Why not go in for science, Jim?"

"How do you mean, mummy?"

"All those birds and stones with the funny names in the museum are science, aren't they?"

"They're only birds and stones. But you mean I should go out with a net and gun to catch butterflies and things?"

"Not with a gun, Jim; that would be rather too cruel to the pretty butterflies. But I think you would catch cold, too, Jim; so perhaps it would be wiser to leave science to staid, elderly men. Besides, it seems a pity to shoot little birds just to pin long names to them." She spoke very seriously.

"It would perhaps only make a prig of me, too, for I don't take a real interest in that kind of science; and you know, if a fellow takes up that game just to look wise, he always ends up by looking a fool."

"You might take to building railways, like—like——" She couldn't bring herself to the end of the sentence.

"I wish to goodness I could, mummy; I wish I'd been taught a business; but I never had his brains." Jim's voice had dropped a tone. "I wish—I wish—— Oh! I don't know what I wish."

"Get married, Jim; that will settle you."

He looked at his aunt doubtfully, but saw she was still serious.

"I never thought of that, but who should I marry?"

She got keenly interested at once.

"Now, there's Kate Reilly; she's 21, well educated, plays the piano nicely, is pretty—and I'm sure she'd have you."

"Do you think she could look after me as well as you do, and prevent the servants getting lazy? Wouldn't she be mistress here, too, if I married her?"

"Um!" said his aunt, reflectively, rubbing her lips with a crochet needle.

"Besides, I think she's more interested in Thompson than in me."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Thompson's, I think. He's better looking, and is getting £800 a year in the Government."

"He's fat and middle-aged, and is always trying to be funny. She's a fool," said mum, disparagingly. "Anyway, I wouldn't like a girl to marry you for your money."

"They all know I've got money, or their mothers do, which is pretty much the same thing." His aunt ran through a dozen names of various fascinating and eligible young ladies she and Jim knew, but Jim found serious disqualifications in them all.

"The trouble is, you don't want to marry, Jim," she said, petulantly. "Well, there's plenty of time."

"And nothing to do with it," said Jim, disconsolately. He rose. "I shall go out for a walk, mummy; expect me in for dinner."

Twenty minutes after dinner time Miss Anstey was looking anxiously out of the drawing-room windows for Jim, expecting him every moment, and wondering why he was late. She went back to the dining-room for the tenth time, and was startled by the banging of the front door.

"Mummy! Mummy!" called Jim; "I've done it."

"Good heavens! Done what?" She ran out, expecting to see him with a black eye and a bleeding nose. The last time he had come home so excited was to proclaim a victory in a schoolboy battle years before, which she thought looked very like a defeat. Her mind flew instantly to raw beefsteak and cobwebs; but Jim's face was almost radiant, and his features sound.

"Done what? You naughty boy." He was still very much a child to her. "I thought you were hurt in one of those dreadful fights."

"I've got a billet."

"What's that? Bad French?"

"No! A good job—and I'm so hungry."

"That's right; I have been waiting for you; and what's a job, as you call it."

"Let's begin at the beginning. When I left you I took a hansom——"

"You said you were going for a walk?"

"Don't be so beastly literal, mummy——"

"Jimmy! Jimmy!"

"Beg pardon, mummy, but I drove into town, and there I met old Evans, you know—the fellow who bosses the Merchants' Bank. He was quite nice and friendly—the beggar used to look down on me, too. He asked me to come and have some lunch, and got talking finance and

a lot of uninteresting things like that. I pretended I understood all about it—he must have known I was a mug." His aunt looked blank. "Now, don't you put on side by pretending you don't know what a mug is, mummy."

"Of course, it's something to drink out of." Her face lightened. "You don't mean to say he borrowed money from you to drink with?"

"Mummy, you're a duffer—a mug means a duffer."

Jim looked quickly and fearfully at his aunt; it had come out unintentionally.

"Oh, is that it? Why couldn't you speak more plainly, Jim?"

He thought it safer to leave the question unanswered, and went on—

"Then Evans got telling me how hard it was to get capable clerks who were reliable, too. They engaged half a dozen to go into the country, but four of them cleared for the new goldfields in Westralia. They couldn't spare any more from the city branches, and it would be at least a week before they could get the proper guarantees settled for the new applicants, while they are awfully hard pressed just now. Poor chap, he looked quite melancholy; but he had set me thinking. At last I chipped in—'Let me have one of those billets.' He looked as if he thought I ought to be dead or in a lunatic asylum. But I was in dead earnest, mum. When he recovered he asked me what I knew about bank clerking, then laughed—at my look, I suppose. I wonder why these men all seem to drop on to the very question that puts you out? I told him I was willing to learn, just to find out how finance was run from the beginning. I thought that a rather smart explanation for me"—Mum looked as if she thought so, too, but Jim didn't seem to understand—"but he *was* surprised when he found out I really knew nothing about it. Then he said as a matter of biz. he might put me in, in spite of my want of experience, on the condition that, when I'd had enough, I would open an account in the Merchants' Bank. He evidently thinks I'm going to be sick of the game pretty soon. I don't, so I promised. Boorana's the place, a tin-pot township somewhere up north, with the railway running through

it. Evans said it is a picturesque place, surrounded by or near hills. I didn't quite follow him there. They want the extra hand there most badly, as the season has been a good 'un; so I'm off on Saturday next."

"And you never thought of me all alone here, Jim?" His face fell. Seeing it, she went and put her hand on his shoulder kindly.

"You did quite right, Jim, to decide for yourself. It is time, now you are alone, that you should learn to stand alone. You may have one idea of what the change is going to do for you; but you may depend it is going to be entirely different from what you expect. I am only saying this to prepare or forewarn you of an inevitable disappointment; for it is the first time in your life you will have been really your own master. I have faith in you, Jim, for at bottom you are the son of your father, and he was a good man." She stooped and kissed him. "Now I'll go and see about getting your things packed." While Jim wondered already why he wasn't so pleased with himself as he expected.

## CHAPTER III.

Boorana was not a large place, nor a very important one. It had a population of about 600, and one business street, in which was the bank, four public-houses, and a miscellaneous collection of small trades. The bank was the finest building; the public-houses came next in the order of their respectability. The shops were of an architecture which primarily suggested economy — and drink. The pubs were all prosperous. Every house had a galvanised iron roof, which caused the inhabitants to stew and simmer in summer, to freeze and shiver in winter. Galvanised iron has one merit—it keeps out the rain splendidly—when there is any, which isn't often. Its principal defect is the splendid way it lets in the draughts, and provides the doctor with illimitable coughs and colds to treat. The doctor also lived in a galvanised iron roofed house. But it is a poor doctor who does not look at things from a medical point of view; and he could not see the sense in giving a suggestion which would wipe out a quarter of a rather variable income; so he packed his own ceilings with sawdust to make them draught-proof, and held his tongue.

There was no society in Boorana which gave balls and dinners; it sought more effective ways of boring itself, by being so intimate as to drop in at the most inconvenient times. It was no less interested in babies, servants and scandal than its city prototype; but was much more keenly interested in the weather, from a purely commercial as distinct from a social point of view; so it was never at a loss for conversational matter.

Like the city, it was sharply divided into grades, which were defined in the main into those who could go to the city when so inclined, and those who could not.

There were four families which led, or thought they did—it is pretty much the same thing—the tone of the place. They had secret dreams of becoming an untitled county aristocracy, based on the fact that they owned

between them 70,000 acres of land. They knew that in England the ownership of 7,000 acres carried great social and legal privileges; therefore, they were quite content in thinking that they were as good as several dukes and many a lord, in spite of the absence of the titles. Not having handles for other people to distinguish them from the herd, they claimed distinction by posing as good democrats. So the eldest male of the four families got into Parliament on the strength of his blatantly democratic sentiments, which he consistently voted against in the House, and kept his seat by judicious cadging for road grants, and the equally judicious distribution of J.P.-ships. Their politics were simplicity itself. They watched the way the crowd went—and pulled the other way. It saved a great deal of mental wear and tear, and left them with the consoling idea that the intelligent minority of great minds always leads. They never realised they were trying to lead the State horse by the tail, so they hung on manfully, politically safe as long as it did not kick, and patiently waited for the horse to discover that its brains were in its heels.

None of these families lived in Boorana. That would be really—well, too dreadful, as Miss Welstrom said one day to the bank manager's wife, with an elevation of the eyebrows that expressed mild horror. Mrs. Grant, who did, agreed with her sympathetically. But she was Scotch. In addition to the first four, was another family. Though Mr. Horeton was known to be a wealthy man, his social position was decidedly nebulous. But everybody agreed to two things—the first was that Horeton was a mystery; the second was that he was a miser. Everybody was nearly right only as to the latter.

Miserliness had always been in Horeton; it had nourished him into the perpetration of his swindle, and grew with its success. But when Smith and Johnston left, cursing him, it inspired him with a terrible dread of poverty. He thought there was nothing to fear as long as he was wealthy, which is a peculiarly miserly idea. It is also why the people of Boorana were only nearly right. In marriage his attribute pursued him. He courted Mary Hodgson because she was sole heiress to 3,000 acres

of good grazing land near what he was acquiring. She thought he could not be courting her for the sake of her property, as he had enough of his own. Therefore, in accepting him, she was certain he loved her. On the same line of reasoning, he was certain she loved him. They never knew the truth as long as they lived. But as their marriage was founded in a mutual misunderstanding, they both quickly found that something was wanting—something which starved them morally, and which neither had imagination enough to discover.

His miserliness also appeared in the rearing of his children. As soon as the girls were old enough, he dispensed with servants, and got his wife to train them into splendid house managers. But that result was incidental, thus accomplishing two purposes, both to the benefit of his pocket. It was after the birth of the boy, whom they named Harry, that Mrs. Horeton seemed to wake up. In the essentials of food and clothing, she did her duty to her daughters; but for Harry she did that, and a great deal more. His sisters became merely means to an end, which was his pleasure; apart from that, they were neglected. In matters connected with the children, Mrs. Horeton had absolute sway, her husband never interfering, except to approve if her action meant economy. To Harry he let her be everything except extravagant. In her son she found an idol on which to lavish all the unexpended love that should have been distributed between all the children and her husband. The girls grew up formulating their own ideas of what constituted a world; it was a motherless world. The result was curious. Left to the society of grooms and their own untrammelled imaginings, Kate was found, at the age of 17, rapturously kissing the stable-boy. He was instantly dismissed, and Mrs. Horeton grew thoughtful. Kate wrote poetry on desolation and the stars, which she read to the sympathetic tears of Nell. She recovered in a month, and saw no connection between a love passage and a new freedom her mother granted to both of them. It was no newly-aroused affection which altered their mother's attitude; merely the idea that it would be unpleasant for Harry if they should marry stable-boys. They went out more, and made acquaintance with the re-

mainder of the children of the other landed families.

The first thing they learnt was that they were expected in the future to have money, which seemed a lot when the amount was never stated definitely. The next thing they learnt was that the family economy took away more than it saved in cash; and with freedom came aspirations, which caused the bonds of their narrow family life to cut deeper and deeper as time passed. They also discovered that Harry was very much less than the ideal of perfection that their mother had trained them to believe, which gradually separated them from him; but drew the girls closer together. When Kate was 22 and Nell 20, all the local young men of means or eligibility were either married or scattered. By this time the girls' bonds were cutting very sorely, and in their own narrow view the only knife to cut them was marriage. This important conclusion led them to examine their qualifications for matrimony. That they were excellent house managers was unknown to them, and consequently overlooked entirely. That they were good looking was hazily recognised; but, having no standard of comparison, they did not know they were really beautiful, both in face and figure. Kate was the more beautiful of the two; but affection made her see the greater beauty in Nell. So it was agreed that Nell must marry some good man, and have Kate to live with her. It was a hazy, foolish scheme, which ought have died for lack of opportunity to materialise. Unfortunately, the opportunity came, with the, as usual, totally unexpected consequences, affecting the lives of many people who never knew of the existence of two neglected and passionate girls.

## CHAPTER IV.

When Jim arrived at Boorana, it was after a trip which had surpassed in interest any that he had taken in Europe. Not being given to self-analysis, he could not say why it was so. But the very fences that flew past him were a boundary, which was subjective rather than objective—suggestive of a freer, more useful life beyond. He saw with a new interest the flocks of sheep, the mobs of cattle slowly browsing on the hills and plains, and knew that his immediate future was to be in some way in connection with them. Even the fields of grain had their significance. When the train stopped he was impatient; when it was fastest he wondered petulantly why the Government didn't supply reasonably speedy engines, and when he arrived at Boorana he was pleased that the Government had done so much.

As it was a race day, the township was almost deserted, but he managed to secure a room at the expense of a bookmaker when the landlord found he was to be a permanent boarder. Subsequently, his landlord bundled the indignant bookmaker into the cellar. Seeing his things placed in his room, Jim determined to take a stroll round to view his new location. The first thing he noticed was that the country was beautifully green, and therefore thought it was very rich, and always like that—but he was green, too. On the south-east side of the township was a great range of hills, which were high, and near enough to hide the mountains lying beyond. The range sank gradually north and south, with a break here and there, until it undulated into a faint blue streak scarcely distinguishable from the horizon. Great pearly clouds hung low over the hill-tops, casting broad patches of shadow, turning the vivid bluey-green into a rich blue. On every other side of the township were the plains, flat, monotonous, and extending almost unbrokenly into the heart of the continent. A long, straight road ran westwards into the plains, guided by two lines of box trees,

which made a fine natural avenue, narrowing down in the distant perspective, till the avenue and the road merged into one, and disappeared together. At right angles to this road, and near the township, ran another, which wobbled erratically, and suggested better chances of revealing more by hiding so much; so Jim sauntered along, marvelling at its want of repair. Crossing a creek by a rickety bridge, he came to a large area fairly clear of timber, and beyond it a paddock clearer still. In one part were a number of human figures, sauntering about between a lot of buggies and horses, dotted here and there with the bright jacket of a jockey. Then Jim knew it was a race meeting, and that he had struck the race-course.

There were many strangers there, so he was scarcely noticed except by some hawk-eyed and hawk-nosed book-makers, who shouted their odds at his city clothes. Ignoring these, he wandered, casually inspecting things. The race track was full of stumps, except in front of the winning post. The buggies of those who had them composed their grand stand; that of the children was the trees which happened to be near the track and climbable. They had a wonderful confidence in shaky-looking timber, and the best view of the racing. Inside the track was another; but it was unofficial, so to speak, made by the wheels of buggies, and the hoofs of horses which followed each race round. There was infinitely more fun to be got out of the unofficial track than the other, for its racing was unrestricted by cumbersome regulations. A race started five minutes after Jim arrived. He never saw it; but watched the excited visitors, who, with a complete disregard for their axles, horses, and necks, tore round the unofficial course, yelling encouragement, screaming threats to the jockeys, bumping and jolting over stumps and logs, threading their way through trees like needles through a darn, and cutting off corners to come out level with the racing horses, to pull up at the finish, flushed, perspiring, happy or angry, according to whether their individual fancy had lost or won. As one result of the race, Jim saw three fights to settle the responsibility for a broken spoke, one buggy wheel smashed and a man with a black eye. The fights were still pro-

gressing. The man with the black eye asked the man who had given it to "Come an' 'ave a drink;" then, seeing Jim, included him as he was a stranger. Over the second race he nearly had a fight for not taking up a bet offered by a half-drunk holiday maker, who at the refusal resented Jim's city clothes—said he was "a blanky toff, too good to be there." The trouble was settled by the customary request to "Come an' 'ave a drink." Outside the usual racing vernacular, it was the most frequent remark to be heard. To avoid drunken stragglers, Jim took up a position in the crowd close to the winning post, and on looking across the track he saw two of the prettiest girls it had ever been his luck to see. They were with a third girl and an elderly lady, in a well-washed buggy, drawn by a very restive horse. It was the horse which had drawn Jim's eyes across the track. As each race was run, the horse got more restless. At the fourth, just as the racers were coming round into the straight, it broke away from its driver's control across the track in front of them. Shouts of warning rose about him as Jim leapt across the track, and, grasping the reins just behind the bit, he held the horse back while the racehorses thundered past not three feet from his back. All the occupants of the buggy were very white; but Jim did not notice anything more about them, as the horse had trodden on his foot. He limped away to a tree, and sitting down by himself, he drew off his boot and sock before the hurt had time to swell, coming to the conclusion at the same time that country race meetings were a bit too exciting to be entertaining, and began to wonder how he would get back to his hotel. Then the elderly lady came to him, and, seeing his bare foot, she said, "Wait a minute." Without another word, she disappeared, leaving Jim vaguely speculating about country ways; but within the minute she returned driving her buggy, with only one of the girls in it. Leaving her to mind the horse, the elderly lady got quickly out, bringing a napkin from the lunch basket. Then, dropping on her knees, she skilfully and gently bound up his foot, at the same time heartily thanking him for his plucky conduct. When she had finished she rose and said—

"You're the new bank clerk," Jim looked at her in

surprise. "Oh! you won't be surprised at our knowing things like that in the country after you've been here awhile; besides, you've been expected for nearly a week past. Now, where are you staying, Mr. Smith?"

"At the hotel."

"Which?"

"Murphy's."

"Humph! You might have been better advised."

"I advised myself."

"You're younger than I thought. Well, as you can't walk home, you'll have to come with me whether you like it or not. I'll put you up till Monday."

"But I don't think I——"

"My name is Mrs. Warren—I'm quite respectable," she said, in response to his blank expression; "and I believe you are, as you are in the bank—the Merchants is particular, Mr. Smith. So come along."

Not quite seeing how to refuse, he accepted the invitation. She was so genuinely sympathetic and motherly, and her gratitude was so real, that to have done otherwise would have looked ungracious. She supported him to the buggy, casually remarking to the girl seated therein—"Mary, Mr. Smith, the new bank clerk; my daughter, Mr. Smith."

Forgetting his foot in an effort at a formal bow, Jim's face screwed into a comically wry smile. Mary laughed; so did her mother, and Jim, too, as he took Mary Warren's outstretched hand, and she helped him into the back seat beside her. The informality and simplicity of it astonished him. He found Mrs. Warren nearly as interested in his welfare as his aunt could have been; and before he was aware of it, found himself chatting as naturally as if he had known her all his life. Then he asked where were the two girls she had had with her.

"Oh! I sent them home in another buggy."

"That seems a very free and easy arrangement, and might I ask if they are also your daughters?"

"No; they are the Horeton girls."

That conveyed nothing to him.

## CHAPTER V.

Next morning Jim was sitting on Mrs. Warren's vine-clad, sunlit verandah, his injured foot cushioned on a stool. On his left was a table laden with wine, cake, and books; on his right was Mary Warren. In front of him were two fine sheep dogs, stretched on their sides in the sunshine, occasionally sitting up to snap at a fly, and give a covetous look at the cake; then lying back again with a noisy flop to dream of infinite cake and tender rabbits.

Jim had been entertaining Mary with accounts of what he had seen on the continent. He knew far more of Europe than Australia. She had listened with longing attention, her mother joining them now and then, but more often inside attending the management of the house. Mrs. Warren was a widow and her own mistress, with only one child out of four at home. She was also the head of one of the four families, and the owner of 11,000 acres of land.

"How unfortunate you must have been, having to leave off the splendid travelling for a poky situation in a poky little bank."

Mary was quite familiar with vague rumours which came to Boorana ahead of him, that Jim was wealthy, and of an eccentric turn of mind. Jim was unaware of both facts.

"I don't know that I was unfortunate," said Jim, frowning thoughtfully. "I needn't——" He was interrupted by the sound of a horse cantering up the drive. Mary looked disappointed.

"It's Harry Horeton," she said.

"Brother of those two girls?"

"Yes."

Jim looked at him closely as he dismounted and hitched his horse to a post. He saw a man of medium build, not bad looking, but with the half-sullen, half-domineering expression of the spoilt boy. He was younger than Jim, about 19, with a fine horse, well harnessed. As he

came along the verandah he looked suspiciously at Jim and Mary, was coldly formal on his introduction, and familiarly friendly in the way he went unasked into the drawing-room for a chair, which he placed close on the other side of Mary, and sat down. Yet he was awkward. He wished to begin a conversation, seeing clearly that he had interrupted one that was quite interesting without him. He mumbled something about the weather, in the manner of which the effort to be casual was obvious. Jim and Mary politely agreed with him. He evidently expected more from Mary, and mumbled something about the dogs, as an unusually long yawn of warm content from one attracted his attention. Jim replied that they were beautiful animals. Harry looked surprised. Good was the most superlative adjective he had ever heard applied to them; so he muttered that he couldn't see much beauty in a dog; but admitted they were very useful. Mary smiled.

"Isn't that their beauty?" asked Jim, with the desire to oil the conversational wheels.

"No," answered Harry, argumentatively—"a plough is a very useful tool, but I can't say it's a very beautiful one."

"As I was coming up in the train, I overheard a farmer say a plough he had was a beauty."

"He only meant it did its work well—did it beautifully."

"Can't a sheep dog do its work beautifully?"

"Of course."

"Then you can say the dog is beautiful, can't you?"

"Yes! And mean the dog's work—not the dog."

"But the work is a quality of the dog—it is beautiful; therefore, the dog is beautiful."

"Q.E.D.," said Mary; "I'll be seeing beauty in a nail next, Mr. Smith, if you go on in that fashion."

"Why not? Nail-makers and carpenters probably do; they know the difference between different nails of the same kind."

Harry looked petulant.

"That's all talk; you can prove anything by talk—even the wrong is right."

"They're necessary to each other, anyway," said Jim,

reflectively, but with a twinkle in his eye. Harry began to think Mr. Smith was a mild and inoffensive crank, and, disregarding the twinkle,

"How's that?" he asked.

"The difference between 'em is only one of degree, not in kind."

Harry looked puzzled.

"I can't follow," he said.

"Unless we had wicked people, we'd never know we had good people."

"That's mere metaphysics. The difference is absolute between good and bad, and metaphysics have proved nothing yet." Harry was quoting some unremembered authority.

"It was through metaphysics that man first reached the idea of a Deity."

"Was it?" queried Harry, contemptuously. Then dogmatically—"It was through misunderstanding the Deity that we first got metaphysics. The knowledge of right and wrong was given to us by direct inspiration from Gawd." Harry was of that kind of religious temperament that always felt more awed by pronouncing God Gawd. "You will be saying morality is only relative next."

"I think I've already said it. What do you say it is?"

"Morality, of course; everybody knows what morality is," said Harry.

"What conduct do you define as moral, though?"

"Doing what is right."

Harry looked at Jim as if he thought him a silly kind of fool not to know what morality was.

"What is right?"

"What isn't wrong, of course."

"Isn't that a rather metaphysical way of putting it?"

Mary laughed. Harry flushed angrily.

"What's right is right, and I always know when I am doing wrong."

"What is your standard?"

"The ten Commandments and the New Testament."

"Do they state specifically when it is wrong to thrash a dog?"

Harry flushed angrily again, looking suspiciously at

Mary, and glancing surprisedly at Jim. Mary shook her head ever so slightly at Harry. Observing her, Jim changed the incidence of his question—

"Or when not to feed your horse?"

Harry flushed more angrily still. Mary's eyes opened wide.

"Confound it!" said Jim, mentally. "But perhaps neither is wrong under some circumstances," he added aloud.

"That's quite true—they have no moral sense; but we treat them according to how they work."

"Then you reward them with plenty of tucker and no lickings?"

"Yes; we feed a horse or dog well, and they work well."

"So will a man," said Mary. Her remark broke the line of Jim's argument, for which he was inwardly thankful.

"I know men who work less the better you feed 'em," said Harry.

"I don't," said Mary, emphatically.

"Why do you work, Mr. Horeton?" asked Jim.

"We like to see the property do its best; that's a pleasure in itself."

They were talking now rather than arguing.

"And, of course, it means a larger income," said Jim.

"Yes; that's how we know."

"It gives you more than your necessities, too."

"I don't know; one's needs grow with money."

"I have often wondered what men would do with their superfluous money if they had not acquired a lot of artificial needs; for the richest man then could not get through more than the poorest—enough to feed, clothe, and shelter him."

"There's art and things to use the money on," said Harry.

"Unfortunately, it's mainly comparatively poor men who appreciate that sort of thing most."

"It's a bit hard to understand," said Mary; "and somehow it doesn't seem quite fair."

"It doesn't look right," said Jim. His eyes twinkled again.

"Good heavens! you'll be saying wealth is immoral next."

"I don't know that it isn't. The acquisition of great wealth has created the necessity for morality different from that of a more primitive society." Jim's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"What the deuce do you think is the origin of morality? I don't know anything in religion against the acquisition of wealth."

"I think morality arises from organic necessity."

"What!" Harry was looking at Jim as if he suspected lunacy again.

"Physiological necessity if you like; the need of food when we're hungry, of houses and clothes when we're cold, and, I think, anything that stands in the way of every man getting them is immoral."

"But some men won't work for 'em, and most don't know how."

"The former are immoral, the second ignorant, which is immorality of a lesser degree."

"That is their own fault, but how does great wealth stand in the way of other men who are honest?"

"It can and does buy up all the land which the poor men ought to share."

"But all men can become rich."

"Not when rich men are ignorant enough to buy up land and deprive others from sharing in its use."

"Ignorant rich men!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes; poor men suffer just as much from the ignorance of the rich as their own. You might have heard of Judge Higinbotham; he called the rich here the 'wealthy lower orders.'"

"Whom did he mean?"

"Those who were against his scheme of free education; they were mainly the wealthy classes; he was a democrat, you know."

"A lazy beggar who wants another fellow's land."

"Well, there are immoral democrats as well as the other kind."

"What do you think ought to be done, then, with capitalists?"

"Nothing; they will hang themselves with a rope of

their own ignorance—in this place, at any rate."

"If there's anything in report, you are anything but a poor man, Mr. Smith. How do these doctrines fit you?"

"Badly at present. I don't quite see how to make them fit without blundering into worse evils; so I am waiting to see how things will go with me." The twinkle left his eyes for a moment.

"It's all talk, then, and I was right; you can prove anything with talk, but do mighty little. It seems to me that you are reaching blindly after rank socialism." Harry rose with a triumphant look in his face, and saw Mary watching Jim with a look of pleasure. He had appealed to her sentimental side, and wanted Jim to see it. Harry frowned, and the triumph died out of his face. "I think your remarks are mostly atheistical nonsense, for there's something more, something higher than physiology in morality, and the acquisition of wealth is really the test of strength between men; it is a test of power.

"Irresponsible, and mostly ignorantly abused. Anyway, I think your horse is getting restless, isn't it?" Harry turned and ran to it. Mary followed slowly.

Jim frowningly watched Harry ill-temperedly hustling his horse, making it more frightened. He was annoyed with himself for speaking as he did, half sincerely, half banteringly, about matters on which he had read extensively, and sometimes believed he thought. He was puzzled, too, for speaking so candidly to a perfect stranger. It was like a man we sometimes meet in a railway train, who speaks his most secret affairs in a manner he would never use to an intimate, revealing himself under the seal of the stranger, as surprising to himself as the listener, but heard and said without surprise. Harry Horeton's surprise, however, showed Jim that he had been indiscreet. He had given Horeton the idea that he believed what he said. That was his indiscretion. Lightly said, it was darkly received. That circumstances might give the lightest words an influence for good or evil, he dimly suspected, and he was vaguely uneasy for having used them to a youth as irresponsible as himself.

The horse was quiet now. Watching Harry as Mary was talking to him, he grew angry with himself, which naturally made him angry with Harry; and, feeling that

Harry was angry with him, he felt uncomfortable, for he realised that Harry had seen Mary's interest in him. Suddenly Harry's sullen face softened as he gazed longingly into the face of Mary. She was patting the horse's neck. Jim's heart stirred a little. He might look at a woman in that way, and find in her the touch that crystallises vague desire into emotion, and shape his life to a definite purpose. A crowd of feminine faces flitted through his memory, ending with that of a red-headed girl in a buggy, looking into his eyes with a direct question fearlessly. It blurred in a twinge of pain, as on the previous day. He had forgotten his injured foot. A dull elation stirred beneath the pain, which was prophetic.

When Mary returned in half an hour, he was asleep, the cake-dish empty, and the dogs trying to look as if they, too, were asleep.

Mary looked at Jim intently, thoughtfully, with the freedom of the unseen, but when she turned away her face was inscrutable.

## CHAPTER VI.

During the whole of his five miles ride homewards Harry was thinking of Smith. He saw there was something in him very different from himself—whether it was something superior he did not know, nor did he trouble to think that out. He did not like him, and liked him less as he remembered Mary's flush of annoyance when he arrived, and her laugh when Smith made fun of him. By the time he reached home he had worried himself into a thoroughly bad temper. Giving his horse to the groom, he went to his room, and did not leave it till called to tea. The moment he entered the dining-room, the feminine members of the family saw his mood, and expected discomfort with the partial indifference of habit. His mother indicated that she saw his mood by an extra and more soothing attention, her keen, cold eyes softening with sympathy and affection. To see her face when away from her son, it seemed impossible for it ever to look soft. Her hair was abundant and an iron-grey; her eyebrows were black, very straight, and her eyes were of a cold, steely blue. Two deep lines ran from behind the nostrils to the corners of her mouth; there was a deep line between the eyebrows, which met another across the upper part of her nose. Her lips were thin and straight, the chin prominent, the nose straight and large, with heavy nostrils. Her jaw was square, and always looked set. She was splendidly built—her girls had inherited her figure—tall and straight, physically nearly as strong as a man; and, in spite of her age, moved gracefully and quickly.

When Harry entered the room she took him by the arm, and led him to his seat on her right side. This had been her habit since he could first walk, so none of the family saw anything unusual in it.

It was she alone who waited on him at the table, filling his plate and cup when they were emptied, watching him anxiously to see that he had enough. He never had

to ask for anything. He ate in a sullen silence—everyone else silent with him. His father was apparently too absorbed in his own affairs to notice that he was in the bosom of his family. They had nearly finished the meal, when Mr. Horeton looked up.

"Where have you been, Harry?"

"At Burralong." That was the name of Mrs. Warren's property.

"Did she say anything about those comebacks she wished to sell?"

"I didn't see her."

"When you do, tell her I'll take 500 at 5s. 3d.; 5s. 4d. is too much."

"She won't sell 500; it would spoil the line. She has 1300."

"Tell her the line is too big for one sale, and she'll average more for the remainder by breaking it."

"I don't think she would believe me."

"You might get her daughter to make her credulous."

"I might have had she only had one daughter to be a fool over."

His sisters looked up, more at his change of tone than at the remark.

"Mary hasn't been here for a month," said Kate; "when is she coming again?"

"She didn't say," answered Harry.

"You can generally get her to say," said Nell with a smile.

"None of your cheek, Nell. She's got the new bank clerk to be interested in."

"The new bank clerk! Who is he?" asked Mrs. Horeton.

"What's he like?" chimed in the girls together.

"What's his name?" asked Mr. Horeton.

"I don't know who he is; he's a bit of a prig, an atheist, and a socialist, and his name is Smith," answered Harry to all their questions at once.

"How did he get to Mrs. Warren's?" asked Mrs. Horeton.

"He stopped her horse from running into the racers yesterday, and hurt his foot; so she took him home to nurse him. She has more gratitude than sense."

"He did it rather pluckily," said Kate. "We were in the buggy, too. Mrs. Warren asked us to give up our seat, so that she might drive him home; we thought she meant his hotel."

"There's some report going round the township that he is wealthy and a crank. Old Harrison says he remembers Smith's father when he was building one of the western railways. The father died about a month ago."

Mr. Horeton looked up at his wife rapidly; with equal rapidity the soft expression vanished from her eyes; but they were not too quick for the girls, who both saw the change.

"What's he doing in a bank, then?" asked Nell.

"That's more than I can say; perhaps being a socialist explains it."

"What's a socialist?" asked Kate.

"A fellow who thinks wealth is immoral."

"What?" they almost gasped with surprise.

"Smith says so, anyway—says too much wealth gives too much power to a lot of ignorant brutes who own too much land, and keep others from getting a show."

"Is he mad?" asked Mrs. Horeton.

"He talked sanely enough; but I think he's a bit worse than mad—a confounded hypocrite."

"Why?" asked Kate.

"Because he said that, though he had the ideas, they didn't quite fit him. He seems to think ideas are like clothes, to put on or off according to convenience—juggling with his conscience, if he has one."

"I thought socialists were only poor men," said Nell.

"So they are, which makes me think he's only shamming to be wealthy to make himself look great and broad-minded; or that he has been rich, and too great a fool to be able to keep his money."

"He could hardly get through it in a month, could he?" asked Kate.

"I don't know, but it's only rumour that he is wealthy, anyhow."

"What's his Christian name?" asked Mr. Horeton.

"James—James Smith."

Mr. Horeton looked rapidly at his wife again.

"I saw in the paper that £40,000 was paid in probate

duty on Mr. Smith's estate," said Kate.

"It's a common name, so perhaps he isn't the son of that Mr. Smith; but I'm sure he'd like to be thought so. He is a vain sort of fellow."

"Is he good looking?" asked Nell.

"Mary Warren seemed to think so," said Harry, sullenly.

"Get him to come here, Harry; he must be rather amusing," said Nell.

Mrs. Horeton glanced at her husband furtively. He was staring intently at his plate. He seemed to feel his wife's glance on him, and, looking up, caught the expression on her face, and understood perfectly. If the bank clerk was the son of the James Smith they had known, he was not to come to their house. Harry did not answer Nell, and all further conversation ceased as the girls cleared the table.

When they had washed up they went for a walk. They did not speak to each other until they were seated on the bank of the creek close to the water.

"What are you thinking about, Kate?" Nell then asked.

"Who do you suppose?"

"When you say 'who,' it isn't hard to guess. He looked very handsome and very determined as he was holding that horse yesterday."

"I wasn't thinking of him in that; I was wondering if the report was true about his being wealthy."

"Where there's smoke there's fire," said Nell, sententiously.

"But a little fire sometimes make a great deal of smoke."

"And a big fire sometimes makes little or no smoke."

"Playing with proverbs won't let us into the truth, anyway," said Kate, impatiently. She began pulling the tops off some kangaroo grass at her side; then nibbling them until her fingers wouldn't let her hold them any longer, she would throw them into the stream at her feet, looking alternately at it and Nell.

"Did you notice anything funny about father and mother when Harry mentioned the bank clerk's name?" asked Kate at last.

"Yes; but I thought they saw that Harry was a bit jealous of him. Do you think Harry's very much in love with Mary?"

"There's no doubt about it—calf love—and got it badly, too."

"Why are you looking at me like that, Kate?"

"I'm thinking you're rather pretty."

"Hasn't that ever struck you before?" asked Nell, with an impudent smile.

"Not particularly. Let's see, you're twenty-one next month."

"Well?" Nell was getting interested.

"I'm thinking it's about time you were getting married; you'll get shelved if you don't manage it pretty soon."

"How old are you, Kate?"

"Twenty-two."

"I think it's about time you were getting married, Kate; you'll be getting shelved. Now, what's your little game, my dear sister?"

"Can't say yet; I'm trying to see my way."

"Anything to do with the bank clerk?"

"That depends upon whether he has cash."

"Me or you?"

"You, of course. Then I'll come and live with you."

"What if he should want Mary Warren?"

"She isn't as pretty as you."

"Perhaps she is a better girl, though."

"All the better chance for you."

"You're rather shocking, and decidedly uncomplimentary."

"I have two years' more experience than you. Mary's a bit of a fool, anyhow; she has sentimental ideals."

"What has made you so horribly cynical, Kate?"

"Youth, inexperience, and mother; she hasn't given us a show; she's given everything to that—that—Harry."

"You don't believe in men and women falling in love, then?" Kate shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "I wonder what it really is?"

"Remember how badly you got it with Jack?" Jack was the stable boy.

"If you ever remind me of him again, Nell, I'll—I'll

throw mud on your next new dress." Kate burst into a merry laugh. "What a little lunatic I was, Nell; but it was awfully jolly—the meetings on the sly, and him telling me how lovely I was, and of how he'd work his hands to 'stoomps' to buy a farm for me. A fine farmer he'd have been then"—her face grew hard—"and I suppose I'd have been made a worse drudge than at present, and thrashed, as Ryan thrashes his wife, after we'd been married a couple of years."

"Don't you think the bank clerk might thrash me?"

"He might, of course; but I think he is supposed to be a gentleman, and they don't hammer their wives."

"But you're kindly passing all the risk on to me."

"I didn't see it that way; but if he's rich and hammers you, you can leave him and compel him to support you. Then you'd be free, and what a grand time we'd have, Nell."

It struck neither of them that their views of holy matrimony were decidedly original—for them. They were unacquainted with most of the conventions.

"But I wonder what straightened out mother's face when you suggested Harry should ask the bank clerk here?" continued Kate, musingly. "It looks as if they will try and prevent his coming."

"Try! They'll stop him all right if they want to."

"That depends upon Harry."

"Who dislikes him already, so he'll never ask him here."

"That also depends," said Kate, enigmatically. They were interrupted by Mrs. Horeton calling them from the house.

"Well, thank goodness it's Sunday, and we've had time for a yarn," said Kate; then they rose and hurried back to dress for the Sunday evening service.

## CHAPTER VII.

Jim Smith's foot prevented him taking up his work at the bank for a week. He spent it very pleasantly doing nothing, with the consciousness that before very long he would be doing something; so he was not impatient, but hobbled round the Burralong garden, helping Mary with her weeding and planting, suggesting alterations in the grouping of the plants, and discovered his observations of European gardening was more useful than it seemed likely to be at the time.

He and Mary became very friendly. Mrs. Warren watched from the verandah, where she was sewing, with a twinkle in her maternal eye; yet joining them just enough to make it look unsuspicious, and staying with them just long enough to make them weakly wish she would stay no longer; then discreetly retiring to other affairs. There were no sordid motives in her conduct; she was only worldly-wise, which never appears to know that it is possible for people to fall sentimental-wise. She did not allow the possibility of it to trouble her with regard to Mary, whom she secretly knew was quite convinced that she knew more about the business than her mother; and her mother was experienced enough to see that Jim was a very decent young man, as young men go. But to have had no interest in Mary's matrimonial possibilities would have made her less than motherly. When Saturday came round once more, Jim had come to a very sincere conclusion that Mary was a very good comrade. The weather was still fine, and his foot almost recovered. It was the usual day for visitors. Mary, her mother, and Jim were sitting on the verandah expectantly; yet too content with things as they were to wish anyone would come. They went inside to prepare afternoon tea. They had hardly gone, when Jim saw a buggy come through the gate at the end of the drive, which was driven along another track straight to the stable behind the house. He saw it contained a couple of well-dressed young women,

who were evidently on a very friendly footing with the Warrens. Jim picked up his magazine. Mary brought out a little table for the tea.

"Two ladies have just driven round to the stable," said Jim.

"Who are they—do you know?"

"No; my eyes are not sufficiently countryfied to recognise people at half a mile yet."

Mary went inside. Jim sat reading the print without understanding it. He was getting interested in Mrs. Warren's visitors, and was listening for them to come through the house expectantly, vaguely hoping they would be the pretty girls he had seen on the racecourse, and was surprised at his own curiosity. Then he heard footsteps on the gravel at the end of the verandah. He looked round quickly—and was startled. The two ladies were a perfect contrast; one was dark, the other fair; but of about the same height. It was the dark one, Kate, who startled him. In movement she was grace itself, and her figure betrayed to even his masculine mind that it had not known corsets for years; it was too proportionate, and she was as erect as if she had balanced a pitcher on her head from her first toddle. In the shade her hair was black; in the sunlight, a glowing, dull red.

"The real Titian," flashed through Jim's mind. Her lips were slightly thin, though beautifully curved, over a chin like Venus or Milo's. Her eyebrows were a dark brown; the eyes a deep Irish blue. He only glanced casually at Nell, for, beautiful as she was, it was a familiar type. Kate had observed his expression of startled admiration as she stepped on to the verandah; but she only looked at him with a peculiar, unsmiling directness, which was as novel as it was uncommon. Jim rose and stood waiting for them to approach. Then he saw they were not accustomed to meeting strangers. He went towards them.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing you, but I think I owe you an apology for depriving you of your seat in Mrs. Warren's buggy last Saturday."

"Horeton is our name, and we have to thank you for getting us out of a hole."

"And putting you to the inconvenience of going home

in someone else's buggy."

"That wasn't an inconvenience—that is, not much"—she flushed—"it didn't matter in the least," she added, awkwardly.

"I am Mr. Smith, the new bank clerk," said Jim, laughing. "Everybody seems to know me by my office rather than by my name here. I suppose they'll get hold of my name itself in time. It isn't a hard one, is it?"

"It's a very common—that is, it's—it's a very easy one not to remem—to forget, I mean." Kate had never felt so clumsy in her life before.

Jim turned to Nell with a smile, and said—

"I suppose you're fond of riding, and do a great deal?"

"Oh, yes, a good lot. At least, we used to ride somewhat"—she was inwardly wishing she knew all about the art of saying things neatly—"but women are rather useless on horses where nobody rides except as a business. We used to ride a lot as girls." Then she forgot Jim was a stranger. "It was such fun, too. We rode straddle, and we always had to sneak out on the moonlit nights, catch the horses in the hill paddock—they were not in use on the place, you know—and ride for miles bare-backed, with only the halters for bridles. On the way home we used to race. One night we picked up a brumby, which Kate ran in. They thought it had jumped in after the other horses. We didn't let on, except to Jack, the stockman, who broke it in for her, and gave me one of his. Father and mother never knew till someone told Harry he had seen us at midnight galloping up Wild Dog Gully after a wallaby. We got an awful hiding from mother, and father sold the horses—said he didn't want his girls to be seen half-naked galloping round the country——" Nell blushed and stopped; it suddenly struck her that she was very confidential.

"What's the rest?" asked Jim, keenly interested; but she was unable to go on. Jim turned to Kate, and found she was watching him with her unsmiling directness. She was quite unconscious of it, for she still watched him when he looked at her. At last she smiled.

"Nell was always enthusiastic about horses; she likes them for their own sake. Father looks upon them as a matter of business."

"Then what a pity Harry—your brother, I presume?"—they nodded—"didn't join in your riding parties instead of putting you away. They must have been fun."

He put them quite at their ease again, and they related their riding experiences to the first willing and sympathetic listener they had ever had. Baring all their past lives, their joys and sorrows, unconsciously revealing that their joys had been few and far between, and mostly stolen, which had evidently given them the greater zest. All their awkwardness was forgotten. When Mary came out, she found an introduction was quite unnecessary, and listened with an inward and growing surprise. Kate was explaining how difficult it was to stick to a bare-backed buck-jumper with her boots and stockings on, and how comparatively easy it was for the bare feet and legs to get a good grip of the horse's hide, when she suddenly glanced at Mary's face, and stopped abruptly. Guessing the cause, Jim looked round quickly at Mary, but her face was blank. A look of keen anger flashed through Kate's eyes. Nell was looking puzzled.

"You must take us for gawky bumpkins, Mr. Smith," said Kate. "You can see we've not been used to social usages when I can talk so glibly about what I suppose I should hold my tongue"—Kate always went straight to the point when she was angry—"and I beg your pardon, Mr. Smith. But I wish you had changed the subject when we went too far."

It was Jim's turn to look angry.

"That is exactly what I would have done, Miss Horeton—if I had thought you were going too far." And felt like a prig.

"What on earth have we done, Kate?" asked Nell.

"Nothing, it seems; but I thought I was saying something stupid or uninteresting."

Mary did not look at Kate again, and when she saw Jim's face she bit her lips with vexation. She began to respect Kate. Then Jim told them some of his ridiculous adventures in Japan—with reservations; and in five minutes had them all laughing. When the time came for them to leave, he went round to the stables to help them into the buggy, and when they drove off he stood

looking at them rather wistfully, till Mary Warren came up to him.

"They're the—the—most interesting girls I've ever met," he said, weakly. "I've never seen anything like them." Then abruptly—"What made you give Miss Horeton the sign to dry up?"

"I didn't do it for your sake."

"It was because of her unusual simplicity, I suppose."

"Yes; such innocence is too alarming."

"And if she had been only acting the innocent, you'd have——"

"Let her fool you."

"I see you ladies don't like to see too much simplicity in each other. Now, Miss Warren, are you going to play square, or all you know?" Jim had all the cynicism of a man of the world in his face, and there was an unpleasant, though mirthful, smile on top of it. Mary looked him straight in the eyes.

"Square, for I've been honest with you," and she lied courageously.

"When I found you out," said Jim to himself.

. . . . . .

As they were driving home, Kate was a long time silent. Knowing her mood, Nell was silent, too.

"Nell," said Kate at last, "we don't go out anything like as much as Mary Warren, do we?" Nell shook her head. "Well, we'll have to. I was mad with my stupidity when Mary's eyebrows went up. I've been thinking. Now, this is one thing I've learnt: We must never mention our legs to young men, especially about them having been bare; for, even if they don't snigger, the women will. We must go out a lot more, talk a great deal less; we must think a lot more, and be as hypocritical as we possibly can to both men and women, and pray that in the end we'll be successful enough to fool ourselves. Then we'll be like—like—Mary Warren."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Warren drove Jim into the township on the Monday, in time for him to take up his duties. His enthusiasm was still hot upon him, and Mr. Grant felt very hopeful about his new clerk's eagerness.

Mr. Grant was a long, spare man. As a joke, people used to ask him if he was "scawtch." He always replied very seriously and very proudly that he was.

Jim had taken off his coat—it was a warm day—hung up his hat, then turned to Mr. Grant for instructions. The accountant was busily writing, as if no one was there.

"Er—Mr. Smith, I'm rather pushed this morning, and have not had time to—er, feed my cow."

Jim offered his services. He got minute instructions how to mix pollard and chaff, interlarded with a small homily on the need of economy. It certainly did not seem a very big feed for a cow when he at last heard the quantities; but he found the homily was intended to prevent his wasting any by spilling. Mr. Grant did not tell him where the stables were; but there was a door at the end of the counter which apparently led to the back. Jim passed round the counter to reach it, and caught a queer twinkle in the eye of Mr. Solomon, the accountant. Jim tried to look haughtily reserved, and as he opened the door he turned to see if Mr. Solomon were duly impressed—and he nearly fell over a child about three years old. A woman rushed into the manager's room at the child's roar, stared scornfully at Jim, picked up her child, and withdrew, muttering audibly about the carelessness of brutes. Jim was rather flustered when he reached the back yard; then suddenly remembered he was looking for a stable, but could only see an old house. On going nearer to enquire, he found by a gentle bellow from a cow that it was a stable; at the same moment she put her head through the front window, and gazed at him reflectively. Jim went to the front door, resisting an effort to knock because it might

seem disrespectful. The cow was in the drawing-room—at least it seemed to Jim as if it had been a drawing-room. The house had only three rooms, and one detached at the back, which had apparently been a kitchen. Here he found the chaff and pollard.

"Two hands full of pollard to a bucket of chaff. Did he mean with the hands together, or as much as one hand would hold twice." He debated the question with himself till the cow got impatient. Then he concluded that as Mr. Grant was evidently of an economical turn of mind, he must have meant two single hands full. The cow did not approve; she nosed it, and looked indignantly at Jim—so he thought. He doubled the supply of pollard, and the cow began to eat contentedly.

In the room opposite the cow's was a horse. It seemed to be very old and very tired, for it was standing with its head hanging quite limply over the bar of its door, and its eyes nearly closed. Jim felt sorry for the poor brute, and put out his hand to rub its forehead under the fore-lock. The horse awakened and made a snap at his hand. Jim hit it across the nose; it tried to paw him, then turned round swiftly—but Jim more swiftly left.

When he got inside he asked Mr. Grant if his horse wasn't rather savage, and was told it was like a lamb.

"By the way, Mr. Smith, I hope you'll be more careful in future when you go out the back way; my children are very fond of me, you know, and are always hanging about that door." Jim promised he would. Mr. Grant went into his own room; Jim saw a high stool near the accountant's, which he went and sat on. Mr. Solomon was poring over a very large book full of very small, neat figures. Jim twiddled his thumbs, and gazed round the temple of mammon. It was more inky than clean, specially behind the counter, on which was a cash box containing a dozen little piles of silver. "Change, I expect," thought Jim. There was a copying press on another table, a waste paper basket under the counter, along the whole edge of which clerks had cut their initials. Having nothing to do just then, he added his to them. Then it seemed this was hardly mastering the details of finance,

"What am I to do, Mr. Solomon?" he asked at last.

"Groom the horse," said the accountant, without looking up.

"I didn't come here as a groom," said Jim, indignantly.

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Are you the boss here?"

"No."

"Then what did you come here for?"

"To be a bank clerk, of course."

"What do you know about biz?"

"Nothing."

"Well, go and groom the horse." Jim looked at the accountant, with a vague idea that Mr. Solomon was insane; but somehow it did not seem as if a man could be mad and an accountant, too. So Jim twiddled his thumbs again, till a little boy came in for change. As Jim was near the tin box he took the sovereign, and carefully counted through one of its little silver piles, and gave it to the boy.

"What did you do that for?" asked Mr. Solomon.

"To see if it was correct, of course."

"Well, count through every pile in the tin and see if they're all correct."

Jim did so, when it struck him they had all been counted out for the purpose when he got them back again.

"What shall I do now?" asked Jim.

"Go through those piles again, and see if they're still correct."

"I won't," said Jim, decisively. "They're all right."

Mr. Solomon came slowly down from his perch and picked out four of the piles; in two there were 18/-, in the third there were 19/-, and in the fourth 23/-.

"Why did you say they were correct?"

"Why, I've just counted twenty shillings worth of silver into each pile," said Jim, in hopeless astonishment.

"You thought you did. Learn to count money." Solomon crawled solemnly back to his eyrie again. Then the manager opened his door.

"If you'll come with me, Mr. Smith, I'll show you how

to groom the horse."

Jim didn't resent the invitation, while the accountant went unsmilingly on with his ledger. That day Jim groomed the horse, carted a load of hay, nursed the baby, had his first lesson in milking, and copied one letter.

Next day he was set to copy unending figures from one book to another; he could not make out why there were a dozen entries for every amount that came into or went out of the bank, until he added up the day's work, and found his balance was out by £100 0s. 2d. The 2d. seemed to make fun of him. Solomon then showed him that he had been entering shillings into the £ column, and pence in the shilling column; this had occurred when the shillings and pence did not have the usual nought before them. Then he had got mixed as to the difference between debit and credit, and had entered sums to debit that ought have gone into the credit, and vice versa. Solomon did not smile at him once, though Jim grinned ruefully at himself. Such foolishness Solomon had apparently expected in a new junior, and it was too much a matter of course to be funny. Jim was interrupted only six times by Mr. Grant, with requests to feed the cow, hunt for the children's ball, and to do various little domestic jobs from feeding the fowls, chopping some wood, to giving the baby a drink of water and milk. He was almost surprised when Mr. Grant did not ask him to come in time to light the fire in the morning. The end of his third day's banking left behind it a painful conviction that he was depressingly ignorant of the smallest detail of finance; but very promising in domestic affairs. The fourth day began auspiciously. He copied two whole columns in two hours, without a single mistake. Customers came in and out, but he did not see them. One old grey-headed man came and cashed a cheque, and, saying he was tired, he sat down and stared at Jim. When Jim had finished his two columns he looked up with quite a triumphant air, and found the old man still watching him. He was getting used to that experience, and put it down to their country ways, where all things were interesting, because there were so few interesting things. The old man rose and came to the counter.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I thought that was apparent to everybody," said Jim.

"But you are the son of James Smith, the contractor."

"That's an encouraging piece of information—and yet I'm here." The old man looked puzzled.

"I knew your father, and you are like him, specially when you was thinkin' over them figgers." He frowned, peering intently. "I don't think I'm mistaken," he said.

"James Smith is a very common name; there are hundreds of them in Australia."

"That may be, but they are not all like old Jimmy, the contractor. There was Jimmy, John—John Horeton, and Johnston—they was partners."

"There must be some mistake, for I never heard my father say he had any partners."

"Well, I've bin 'ere 40 years, and knew every man what come into the district. But I'm gettin' old, and my memory isn't as good as it was." He turned and walked slowly out, turning round at the door. He looked back hesitatingly, then went out muttering.

A toothless old dame came in immediately afterwards. She had clear and merry eyes, and looked at Jim quizzically.

"They're tellin' me, young man, that you're rich. Is that so?"

"I'm earning £80 a year; is that being rich?" Solomon looked up with surprise.

"Well, I don't know, but they're all sayin' as how you're a rich contractor's son."

"Which rich contractor's son; there's a dozen of them in this colony alone?"

"Sure, it doesn't matter much, an' I think it's a lie, for you'd be a new kind of fool to come clerkin' if yer was rich." She pocketed her money and left. The moment she was gone, Solomon turned to him.

"How is it that you're getting £80; juniors only come in on £40. Been in a bank before? But that's impossible." He smiled for the first time suddenly. "There's a lot of funny yarns going round about you. Would you like them stopped?"

"What are the yarns?"

"That you're rich, a socialist, a crank, a genius, and a fool. What are you?"

"As big a fool as they are, I think."

"All right; the old dame will give you your right reputation." He went on with his work.

Hence it was that Boorana was a divided camp on the question of the new bank clerk. Everybody sooner or later saw him doing little domestic tasks for the bank manager, and agreed unanimously that if he were rich he would never be such a fool—they had no other evidence of his foolishness. He was polite to everybody, and intimate with no one but the Warrens, and did anything that came to hand, from feeding Mr. Grant's fowls, adding up figures for the Merchants' Bank, to running little errands for Mary Warren. He wrote often to his aunt, giving her such cheerful accounts of everything he saw and did, that her mind was quite at rest with regard to him. She wrote saying she would like to come and see him. But he did not want any further speculation started on his supposed wealth by the sight of her luxurious clothes, so he put her off by telling her the reason. He never took refuge in subterfuge with her. Not getting any satisfaction out of mere guesses, Boorana devoted itself—when it had time, which was often—to marrying him and finding him in love with half the girls in the place; but as he was mostly out riding with Mary Warren and her mother, who still rode, Boorana felt the prophetic instinct keen within itself. Then it took to positively asserting that he was only in the bank to get enough financial experience to administer the Warren estate before marrying Mary. A conclusion so pleasing to its own acumen was adopted generally, specially as Mrs. Warren was often in the bank on business, and always had Mary with her, with whom Jim came out to yarn while her mother was inside.

The Horetons rarely came to the bank. Mr. Grant fruitlessly bothered himself to find out why Mr. Horeton had withdrawn every deed and removed his account while Jim was sick at Mrs. Warren's; but Mr. Grant never suspected any connection between the two events.

Jim occasionally spoke to the Horeton girls when they drove in for their mail. More often he saw

them as they went past the window. He got all the information he could about them from casual conversation, and found everyone spoke of Horeton with a kind of subdued contempt. He gathered that Horeton was a wealthy man, a determined one, never lost his temper, and never got the worst of a bargain. The only remarks he ever heard about the girls were—"There are" or "Here come the Horeton girls." That they were beautiful Boorana seemed scarcely to know. Once when he remarked that Miss Horeton was rather good-looking, the reply was, "Not bad." They knew she was beautiful, but assumed indifference to conceal their admiration. This he suspected. It was really because they saw that Harry Horeton was beginning to look at Jim with no amiable expression in his eyes on seeing him more and more frequently with Mary Warren.

## CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Horeton saw something was wrong with her son; that he was in love she was incapable of seeing. In her idolatry she completely failed to imagine he could think of any other woman but herself. As all men outside him were mere cyphers to her, useful, perhaps, but of no individuality unless they came into contact with him, then comparison only gave her a more exalted idea of Harry. He was her passion, and consequently saw him through passion-distorted eyes. She knew he often visited Mary Warren; but always explained it to herself as business with Mrs. Warren. She never thought other women could possibly think less of him than herself. Yet she was quite aware that men and women grew up and married. Harry was nineteen, strong-willed, and passionate, of an age when calf love, backed by money, was capable of making him do reckless things—not of his own inclination, but egged on by some scheming hussy who would like such a fine lad as her's, and incidentally a share in his heritage. Mary Warren was about his own age, not likely to be anything approaching as wealthy as Harry, and therefore very likely to try and entrap him; so she hated Mary Warren consumedly.

Harry never confided to his mother the cause of his worry—he knew her feeling towards Mary—so she ascribed his trouble to some neglect on her own part, or on the part of his sisters. Searching her memory, she could think of nothing forgotten by herself; it must, therefore, be Kate and Nell. She acted accordingly.

The two girls were driven morning, noon and night. They no sooner tidied his room than their mother would go in and find something she imagined not to his liking, toss things about, then order the girls back to do it out again. Harry did not see that his room was more carefully cleaned and tidied than usual, nor did he notice the tired faces of his sisters. A clean room and tired sisters were too much a matter of course, and they never com-

plained to him. Kate quickly observed that he could not bring himself to tell his mother his trouble, and promptly divined the reason, for she also knew her mother was jealous of Mary Warren. The cause of Harry's surliness she found out by casually remarking she had seen Mary riding past with Smith. Harry's look of sullen hate as he turned from her was very explicit. Every time she saw Mary and Jim together afterwards she told Harry. She told him it, consequently, very often. Harry at last felt he must tell someone in his craving for sympathy, and as there was no one else likely to be interested, he told Kate what she already knew.

"Look here, Kate," he said, suddenly, after she had remarked that Mary and Jim looked well together, "I wish that fellow was dead." Kate did not feel shocked, nor was she surprised. She knew he wished it.

"What's the matter, Harry?"

"He's turning that girl's head with his flash city ways"—he always used the shearing shed vernacular when he was excited. "I haven't the time to go to Warrens he has, and she's a bigger fool than I thought," he added, bitterly.

"She must be," said Kate, "for you're better looking than he is, and with much better prospects, I should think."

"How do you know I'm better looking?"

"I often see him when we drive in for the mail, and when he is with Mary, too, of course."

"And what do you know about his prospects?"

"He's only a bank clerk."

"Do you think those reports about his wealth are true?"

"I don't know anything about that." Harry watched her furtively. She seemed perfectly serious. Yet it made him quite pleased with himself, and gave him a new confidence. The same day he rode over to Mary Warren's, whistling cheerfully, in response to the hope in his heart. He came back silent and savage.

Next morning, as he was coming out for his horse, he met Kate returning from the dairy. It was bright and warm with sunshine, but that did not alter the ugly

KATE.

"Where the dickens am I to find a prettier face, though?"

"I don't think you are likely to find one." Harry looked at her suspiciously; but Kate seemed quite innocent, as she turned and looked at Nell, who was watching them curiously. Following Kate's glance, Harry looked at Nell too. She had on a large white sunbonnet, of which the strings hung loosely in front of her shoulders; she was wearing a dark blue dress, covered in front by a large white apron. Her skin was like cream. Her bright gold hair was clustered round her forehead in little curls, while her eyes were clear with health, and blue as the sky above them. Seeing they had stopped talking, Nell came forward again, her strong, upright figure swaying slightly and gracefully as she walked. As Harry watched her, a sudden, surprised admiration sprang into his eyes. For the first time in his life, he saw he had a pretty sister; then, swinging round to Kate, he caught an amused smile of comprehension in her eyes. She had been watching him.

"By gum," he said, and began kicking the grass tussock more earnestly.

Nell came up to them.

"What are you two looking so mysterious about?" she asked.

"We were saying how rustic and dairy maidish you were looking."

"What an unnecessary lie, Kate."

"Well, Harry has just discovered that you are rather pretty." Nell blushed.

"Did he look at you first, Kate?"

Harry looked up, and glanced from one to the other. Again the surprised admiration sprang into his eyes.

"I believe you're right, Nell," he said.

"There, now, I always said you were the letter looking, and who's so candid as a brother. Ta-ta, I must take this butter into mother."

"Do you think she'll do?" asked Kate, when Nell was out of hearing.

"I think you'd do better," said Harry.

"I don't. Nell is more attractive. I lose my temper too quickly." She was thinking of the day she first met

Jim at Mrs. Warren's. "Of course, you'll have to ask him here," continued Kate, reflectively.

"I don't like him, Kate. He's an atheist and a socialist, and would make Mary unhappy. I would not like to see any girl married to an atheist." A slight snuffle came into his tone.

"I think that in the end Mary would decide that," said Kate, quietly.

"I know Nell is a sensible girl," said Harry, hurriedly, "and I would have no fear for her if she should attract his regard." He had never thought about Nell's good sense before.

"Do you know anything against Smith?" asked Kate.

"Nothing whatever," said Harry, condescendingly.

"People, on the whole, seem to think he has done rather a wise thing in giving up his money to learn its management."

"Yes; it is very good," said Harry, with a wise air.

"Then I think, under the circumstances, that Nell's future might be trusted to him—even if she were not—sensible."

"I think so, too; but it has taken me some time to reach that conclusion."

"If he is a prig, a fool, or a knave, which you may have some reason to believe, the chances are that as soon as Nell found it out, she would be careful to—to——"

"Wait a bit, Kate; I want to think it over."

She looked over at the hills, apparently absorbed in the view.

"I'm sure I'm right, Kate," said Harry at last. "The fellow's a snob and a prig; I can't say definitely as to his being a knave—time will prove that. Nell, I know, is a sensible girl; so if he should fall in love with her, it will do her no harm, and give the damn fellow a lesson he deserves. Anyway, it will give you girls some fun."

He turned and walked away. Kate stood watching him. As the distance grew between them, a fierce frown slowly gathered on her face, lowering her dark eyebrows till her eyes shone like blue fire from under them, her lips thinning into so tight a line that she could scarcely open them to say—"If I didn't feel sure that Smith was

everything that you say he is not, I'd—I'd feel as big a brute and coward as you are."

That day Nell felt a more sisterly feeling towards Harry than she ever remembered, and went about her work with a light heart, sometimes breaking out into joyous song. She was not accustomed to compliments, and Harry had called her pretty. She vaguely wondered why Kate seemed so glum.

## CHAPTER X.

"Mother," said Harry the next day; "I want to drive the girls over to Burralong this afternoon."

"They were there only a fortnight ago," said his astonished mother.

"They ought to go there more often. Mary must be rather lonely since her sisters got married, and Jack went to town."

"What has that to do with us, my boy?"

"Nothing, of course; but I think the girls ought to go out a great deal more."

"What about the house work?"

"That's just it; I don't quite like my sisters being little better than upper class servants."

"How on earth would the work be done if they didn't do it?"

"Get servants," said Harry. Mrs. Horeton gasped.

"They can't be trusted; they would take too long to train, and would cost too much." A vision of her husband's sarcastic face flitted through her mind.

"And the girls have to cook and wait on a lot of boorish shearers or grooms."

"They've never complained of the conduct of the men."

"I don't suppose they would complain, even if they had reason," said Harry, with a touch of unconscious insight. "Anyway, I've always seen to it that they've had no reason." His mother looked at him fondly. He had sometimes ordered his sisters out of the shed when they lingered a moment to see the shearing, after bringing up the tea—more to show his authority than from any necessity.

"It's five miles to Burralong," said Mrs. Horeton, thoughtfully. "An hour to drive there, an hour to waste in talk, and an hour to drive back—three hours wasted—as long as it takes to scrub the house."

"Do you know, mother, the girls are rather pretty, and ought to marry well."

Mrs. Horeton made a rapid mental calculation of what the loss of the girls would amount to.

"I don't want them to marry," she said, decisively.

"How are you going to provide for them?" asked Harry. Mrs. Horeton made another rapid mental calculation, but from an entirely different point of view.

"I suppose they'll have to marry some day," she said.

"If they wait too long, you know they'll lose the attraction of their pretty faces. I think they're going off a bit as it is," he added, ingenuously.

"You're very thoughtful, dear, to think of them so much; to please you, they may go this afternoon."

"Look here, mother, it's a lot of time to lose driving from place to place. Why not ask the people here, and save two hours?"

"We've never entertained in our lives," said Mrs. Horeton, in surprise.

"That's your fault; they've all tried to get you and dad out. I wonder why you always refused."

By "all" Harry meant the four wealthy landowning families. Mrs. Horeton's face became expressionless.

"We have nothing to ask them to—they all have tennis courts, drawing-rooms, and pretty furniture."

"We can easily remedy that."

"Your father never would."

"But I can; you know my 800 acres bring me in £300 a year. I've not spent a third of it in the last three years."

Mrs. Horeton hesitated—and was lost.

"What will you do, then?"

"First of all, make a tennis court, and—and I don't know what else; but you can tell me as things crop up." He kissed his mother affectionately.

"I'll go and draft those sheep now," he said. And, whistling, he went off to the stable for his horse.

Mrs. Horeton went inside, too abstracted to bully the girls. She was trying to think of what a break from their retired life might portend, hoping that, as Harry desired it, it would bring greater pleasure to him. Looking at that side only, she gradually brightened in the thought of his pleasure. As she bustled about the house, she looked at her two daughters with the new interest

inspired by their brother's matrimonial ideas with regard to them, dimly realising that they were rather handsome now that she looked for it; in fact, a rather good setting to show off her only jewel—her boy. She wasn't in the least proud of them for her own sake, and yet felt a little more kindly towards them because Harry showed a little pride in their handsome faces. The girls themselves only thought she seemed a little better tempered than usual, and wondered inwardly at the cause. Kate did not expect it would be the result of her little talk with Harry—she expected a totally opposite effect—so they did their work as usual, only too glad to do it without her continual interference. But they did not go to Burralong that afternoon.

When the family sat down to tea—they always had dinner in the middle of the day—Mrs. Horeton mentioned to her husband that Harry wished to invite people to the house.

"What's that for?" asked Mr. Horeton, sharply. Nell glanced quickly, suspiciously, at Kate, who asked Nell to pass the butter.

"The children have been asked out so often—of course, they haven't accepted as often—that I think we ought to return their hospitality."

"How are you going to do that?"

"By giving tennis parties and afternoon tea, I suppose," she said, doubtfully.

"We haven't got a tennis court."

"Harry says he'll make one."

"It'll cost too much."

"I'll pay, father," said Harry.

"Oh, all right; who do you intend to ask here?"

"The land crowd, to begin with," said Harry; "and there's the doctor, Grant, Solomon, and Smith, the new bank clerk."

"Who?" said Mr. Horeton, turning an angry, distrustful face to his wife; then, without waiting for a reply—

"I'll think it over," he said. Thinking it over meant talking it over with his wife when they were alone, which was when he and the rest of the family were in bed.

"What's put the idea into Harry's head of inviting people here?" asked Mr. Horeton.

"I think it's because he's getting old enough to wish to have people about him of his own age."

"Couldn't you keep Smith out of the list?"

"I hardly think so without drawing pointed attention to it. He goes everywhere else, you know."

Mr. Horeton was silent awhile.

"Confound the fellow!" he blurted out at last.

"Perhaps he isn't the same—it's a common name."

"Have you seen him yet?"

"No."

"I have, and there's no mistake; he's too like his father."

"Do the people in the township know who he is?"

"No. I can't make it out. He's evidently concealing his identity. That old Harrison recognised him in the bank the other day by the likeness, and asked him if he wasn't James Smith's son. Smith didn't deny it, but evaded the question. Harrison took the evasion for denial; then came to me and asked if I could see any resemblance."

"What did you say?"

"Lied, of course; the old fool wasn't satisfied for all that."

"It's true, then, he has all that money?"

"Yes; Smith pulled up after his slice of bad luck when we dissolved partnership."

"What do you really think he has come into the township for, then?"

"That's just what I'm trying to find out."

"You don't think it's because of his socialist ideas, whatever they may be?"

"Sheer rubbish; a clumsy device to hide some dirty scheme or the other—his father was no fool, and his son's not likely to have been let have those ideas when he was heir to such a pile."

"Then you think——"

"Yes; he's come here to get square somehow," said Horeton, bitterly.

Mrs. Horeton thought of Harry, and trembled.

"I could kill him," she said, vehemently.

"I wish I had some idea of his game,"

"The best way to find that out is to let him come here, isn't it?"

"Perhaps it is," he answered, thoughtfully. Then Mrs. Horeton said quickly, in a brighter voice—

"If he came he might fall in love with one of the girls. If he should marry one of them, he would hardly be likely to—to——"

"He's hardly likely to fall in love with one of *our* girls, under the circumstances."

"You can never tell."

Mrs. Horeton was beginning to secretly wish Mary Warren was under her own eye, so that she could interfere more effectively in case Mary showed signs of scheming for Harry; the signs she anticipated were indications on Harry's part of love for Mary. But this was a new and more terrible fear that had come into her life—the more terrible that it was huge, indefinite, and apparently planned with deep craft, extending over years of study, and therefore more complete. It was part of her, though, that she did not have the slightest fear for herself; it was only how Smith's revenge might hurt Harry that concerned her. She lay silently thinking hour after hour; so did her husband, each believing the other was asleep, and remaining quiet for fear of waking one another. But Horeton was thinking entirely of himself, and both were trembling at heart, frightened at a ghost from their past, which both had thought laid to sleep for ever. Towards daybreak he heard his wife sigh heavily.

"Asleep, wife?" he asked, softly.

"No," she answered wearily.

"He'd better come, I'm thinking."

"So do I," she answered.

"But I hate it—hate it horribly," he said.

She only sighed.

## CHAPTER XI.

There was a great to do all next day at Horeton's. Harry was busy all day with a spade, directing two men he had picked up on the road, on the look-out for a casual job. He contemptuously spoke of them as swaggies; but they were strong and capable, and knew a great deal more about the mysteries of pick and shovel work than he did; for he quickly found it was not so easy as it looked. He put on two more swaggies the next day, with the modest remark that, though they might do as much as he did, it would take all his energy to direct the four. He wiped his forehead.

"For you know, Kate, thinking's a dash sight harder than muscular work."

He sat down wearily, put on a thoughtful frown, stared intently, determinedly at the men—and began to dream of Mary.

It took a week to finish the court; it would have taken five days if Harry had not superintended; but as he wanted it done particularly well on Mary's account, neither Kate nor Nell was able to get him away from it. Kate might have found the means if she had wished; but she judiciously forgot to mention that she had seen Jim and Mary riding twice in the township since the court was begun. The court was duly salted to prevent the growth of weeds, and an eight-feet high wire-netted fence built all round, for Harry had enough of his father's foresight to think of the future—when Mary would be there to be his wife. She would then want her friends to come for a game, and he lost himself again in building an air castle of fine proportions, containing glorious, misty chambers, in which he saw the misty form of Mary trailing beautiful dresses—a gracious princess, the cynosure of all eyes, and superior to every guest.

But while he was dreaming Kate was occupied with the practical side of their scheme. She and Nell spent the week in cleaning out one of the unoccupied rooms

in front of the house, collecting all the little odds and ends of furniture and ornaments they could find. There were not many; but they made a brave show to their unaccustomed eyes. When her mother snapped at them for denuding the house, Kate said it was only to please Harry, and there was a kind of armed peace. Mr. Horeton was like a lost sheep, scarcely recognising the house as his own. Wherever he went, he stumbled over a picee of furniture in a place which had been empty for years, so he barked his shins, said damn occasionally, and looked very worried. Only his wife knew really why.

The four families were very surprised families when they received invitations, with Mrs. Horeton's compliments, to spend the afternoon at tennis. Their comments were numerous, their inferences variable, but inconclusive. The only person who troubled himself least about the matter was Jim Smith; while neither he nor anyone else knew it concerned him the most.

By 3 p.m. they had all arrived, with the exception of Jim Smith. Kate frequently looked towards the paddock gate for him; so did Mary Warren. The gathering was an awkward one; Mrs. Horeton was not accustomed to playing the amiable lady, and knew nothing about saying the little nothings which are as oil on the troubled waters of social intercourse. Various ladies started the inexhaustible subject of dress. Kate and Nell were not very interested in the latest fashion; their ideas of dress were the maximum of comfort, consistent with certain canons of art, which forbade them mixing colours that openly swore at each other, or wear a dress with the cut anyhow. These ends were accomplished by simple observation and skill with the scissors; they were therefore the simplest and best dressed women on the court, much to the astonishment of the four families, who arrived in the most expensive raiment, contrived by a fashionable costumiere—they sometimes suspected there were dressmakers, when they saw dresses on "persons"—who was supposed to design for the vice-regal house. The only people who were thoroughly at their ease were Harry and Mr. Horeton. The latter went round from one family to the other and talked

sheep, making offers, or suggesting bargains. Business time with Mr. Horeton was all time. He kept his hands in his pockets, clacked his tongue occasionally, as if driving a horse—he was trying to drive bargains—swung from one leg to the other, looked as innocent as a dove, and seemed quite unaware that people were his guests for tennis and afternoon tea. Harry was too busy thinking of Mary to see that anyone else was present. As soon as she came on to the court, Kate had contrived to get him in a game of singles with her, which Mary did not seem to enjoy quite as much as Harry. Then Mrs. Warren, seeing that Mrs. Horeton was helplessly formal, that Kate and Nell were inexperienced, took charge of affairs without appearing to do it, and unobtrusively directed Kate by little questions of what she could do. Kate was quick to understand, and looked her gratitude. When Jim arrived, he found everyone laughing and enjoying themselves. Even Mrs. Horeton had a set, rigid smile on her thin lips; while Kate and Nell greeted him with a simple, self-satisfied air that made him think seriously there was something wrong with his memory of his first meeting on Mrs. Warren's verandah. It was Kate now who had taken charge, and Mrs. Warren sat back in contented surprise at having such an apt pupil. She admired Kate immensely.

They were in the first set after the formalities of Smith's introduction to the Horetons—he had met everyone else—when Harry began to notice that the attention of everyone present was directed towards Smith. It scarcely troubled him till he found Mary's replies to his sallies of fun were rather perfunctory; then he saw she was a little distrait—"foozled" was the word he used—and not in the least interested in himself. In a little while he observed Mary looking rather unpleasantly at his sister Nell; then that Jim seemed very interested in Nell. Harry got vaguely angry, and wondered why Nell did not behave herself better than attract the attention of everyone on the place. As for that Smith—"he's only a cocky city bounder," he muttered.

Suddenly he noticed that his father had ceased wandering jauntily round on the hunt for bargains, and was sitting very quietly on the end of a form, staring at

Smith with a look of unmistakable dislike—and a little fear. The set ending, he led Mary over to cakes and tea, where she cleverly manoeuvred him on to one of the four families, whom he promptly deserted to find Kate, in search of sympathy and explanation for his various annoyances.

"You're a nice one to arrange a party for a fellow," he growled.

"What party?"

"This tennis party, of course; you needn't pretend you're so ignorant."

"I had nothing to do with its arrangement; the whole thing is yours."

Harry thought sulkily for a moment. There was subtle flattery in Kate's remark.

"Well, if it is, you might give me a hand with Mary, and get Smith out of the road."

"Smith is doing the very thing you wished, and hasn't spoken to Mary since he came."

"Well, hang it, I can't make head or tail of Mary. She hardly seemed to think she had a partner; only looked mad because Smith was talking to Nell."

"Is that what has made father quiet and mother like a mummy?" asked Kate.

"Did you notice them, too? It looks queer; everything seems at cross purposes since Smith came."

"By that you mean Mary isn't as interested in you as in Smith; and whose fault is that, I'd like to know?"

Harry only grunted. Having finished pouring out the tea, she left him to hand it and cake to the guests. When she returned she sent Harry with some for Mary, and told him to send Nell to her. With her came Smith. Kate told them they were to be opposed next game; while Nell and Harry were to be partners. Harry went glum when he heard of the arrangement. A look from Kate reassured him.

From the start Harry infused the game with a little vindictiveness by refusing to make allowances for mistakes, and claiming none for his own quite obtrusively. But he was considerate in his play towards Mary, which piqued her a little, for she was reputed to be the best lady player in Boorana. They gradually warmed up to it,

the men mercilessly rapid to each other in their volleying. Then Jim began to take a keen interest in the play of the two ladies—Nell in particular, for she made him do his best. He was not much of a player, anyway. The guests were all interested, too, by now. Kate sat near an old gentleman who acted as umpire, watching each turn of the game, and seeing Mary's colour rise as Nell parried and returned her best strokes, till she saw Mary was growing a little angry. Jim was too interested in Nell's play to look at Mary, and Kate saw his admiration growing for Nell's vigour and grace. The interest mounted sufficiently to absorb all the attention of the guests, when Kate happened to look at her mother—and shuddered. She was glaring with a tense fierceness at Jim; her down-drawn eyebrows, and fierce eyes gleaming from under them, her body bent forward and chin thrust out, made her the personification of concentrated hate. Kate stared almost horror-struck, completely losing interest in the tennis. She looked at Smith as if seeking in him what her mother could hate so intently; but on glancing back to her mother she saw the formal, rigid smile on her face once more. The change was almost startling in its suddenness. Mrs. Horeton had discovered the umpire looking at her, too. After 'vantage in the last game had gone from one side to the other half a dozen times, Jim gave the winning stroke. He instantly went to Nell, and began an animated argument on the game. Mary was so pleased at winning that it did not pique her, so she became unusually kind to Harry, hoping to pique Jim; and as she saw Jim glancing at her occasionally, she guessed he was piqued, and became still kinder to Harry, who was consequently in a kind of Elysium, with a growing conviction that Kate was a genius. Kate saw everything going exactly as she had wished, specially in the coming together of Jim and Nell. But she was very thoughtful. As the guests left, she stood on the verandah and watched them driving, riding, or walking away. She saw Solomon linger over his farewell with Nell; Grant lingering to get some information about sheep or something from her father; then forgot them all in watching one solitary figure striding

quickly across the paddocks, watching till it was out of sight in the timber. Then wondered why she was not so pleased at the prospect of Nell and Jim in love as she had anticipated.

## CHAPTER XII.

Jim was musing deeply—for him—on the very woman who was standing on the verandah watching him. He was not given to showing his interest at all if he could help it—much less his feelings—particularly in a woman. Though he had admired Nell's graceful play on the tennis court, his real interest was in the tall, red-headed goddess who dispensed tea and cake with the simple dignity of one bestowing royal favours. He had sometimes wished she would look towards him; but never once did he see her turn his way. He determined to cultivate her acquaintance.

One of the many things he had attempted in his insouciant life was painting. He knew enough of it to know how rare was the great gift of genius in art, and enough to know he would never be a painter himself; yet he thought that if there was anything mundane that might inspire an artist to flights of genius, it was a beautiful woman. He began unconsciously to work out in his imagination the attitude and position in which she would look best; but, after bringing to memory every great picture he had seen and could think of, he thought the Rembrandtesque one would suit her best. Her head, partly in brilliant light and dark shadow, making her wonderful hair look like the night, and shine like gold; stooping to play with beautiful children—her own—with a wealth of maternal love in her unfathomable blue eyes. Jim was feeling quite surprised at his own poetry; but began to doubt if the latter part of the picture was truly Rembrandtesque, when he fell over a stump, which brought him back to the realities of life and a barked shin. But even that did not destroy the pleasurable feeling Kate's beauty had given him. All next day as he worked at his books and casual domestic services for Mr. Grant, the pleasant and subtle elation remained with him, lightening his work, and passing the time so rapidly that he was surprised when the day's work was done.

Going for his evening stroll, Jim unconsciously chose the road to Horeton's. Leaving the road about halfway, he ascended a slight rise. The sun was low in the west, lighting up the face of the hills with a strong yellow glow, which was changed gradually to a deep purple in the gullies. Jutting forward from the main line of the hills was an abrupt, high spur. Just in front of it was Horeton's dwelling, built in the middle of a large V-shaped flat, bounded on two sides by streams, which united at the apex of the V to form the Boorana Creek.

The house was constructed of granite from the spur, roofed with weather-worn shingle, and designed for a much larger family than Horeton's. Having been added to at different periods, it had three different levels, though the whole was surrounded by verandahs, which gave it a squat appearance, enhanced by a thick growth of vines trailing from post to post. It was a remnant of a state of the squatting industry that had passed away with the introduction of wire fences, railways, and shearing machines. Horeton had bought it a year after the quarrel with his partners.

Making a detour, Jim passed round the south side of the house, and crossing one of the creeks, he found a gradual and easy ascent to the top of the spur from its rear. On the summit he found a great slab of granite, about twenty yards square, almost perfectly flat, which gave the spur its name of Table Hill. The western edge of the slab fell abruptly for a distance of about ten feet to the brow of the hill, which dropped at a steep angle to within three hundred yards of Horeton's homestead. The view was magnificent, extending uninterruptedly over the plains, their monotonous olive green broken by square patches of clearing, dotted here and there with the iron roofs of farm-houses, near which were broad green patches of growing crops. On either side extended the hills, rolling and undulating till they vanished in the warm heat haze on the horizon, and over all was a cloudless blue sky, already tinted with red in the west from the setting sun. Jim gazed at the scene entranced for fully five minutes. Then, looking about him, discovered that the Table Hill was evidently a favourite spot for picnic parties. There were old rain-flattened newspapers,

suggesting stale sandwiches; while the ashes of old fires suggested billy tea; the view now suggested picnic rhapsodies, all of which disgusted him, and he looked down at the house, and began to wonder if any of the figures below passing in and out were Kate's. When he reached his hotel it was late. Next evening he returned to Table Hill, and many an evening afterwards.

Often, when returning from some out back part of the run, Harry Horeton would ride to the granite slab, then unbridle his horse, and send it home on its own account; while he would sit on the edge of the granite, and stare at the broad expanse of country below. Nearly all the land in sight was his father's, and a good deal more out of sight.

His only reason for staring at it was to realise that it would all some day be his, and that if Mary would only choose, her's, too. The area was so large, and so tangible, that it seemed to him an irresistible argument in his favour, which always sent him scrambling down the hill, whistling and singing, with a new lease of hope in his heart.

Latterly the intrusion of Jim Smith had been making his vision somewhat hazy, putting anticipated pleasure aside for present pain, through a very real jealousy. Gazing at the sheep and cattle dotting the hill-sides and plains, he felt the sheep were losing their meaning, and the cattle were only animated lumps of stupidity.

Meeting Smith one evening on the table rock, he felt an almost irresistible inclination to order him off the place, which he suppressed, and greeted him with outward politeness; then began talking about the scene from a common-place religious point of view. Jim tolerated it, because he sincerely wished to like Harry. Gradually Harry left out the scenery, and brought his remarks down to a crude theological argument. Harry at first did not see the great capacity in that kind of argument for indulging in personal criticism of a very mean kind, through a lofty sense of duty; but was not long in discovering it.

Jim showed exemplary patience, and talked so quietly that Harry could not be offended without being an obvious prig, even in his own eyes. Then when at last they

did get arguing seriously, Harry had enough sense to see he knew less than Jim; but not enough not to feel angry. At their second meeting, Harry attacked him on his personal views with regard to landlordism. Jim tried at first to argue as when he met Harry at Mrs. Warren's. He regretted then, and regretted now, that he had ever spoken on the subject at all, for he at last saw that it was neither the truth, the error, nor the fun in his ideas that concerned Harry—merely that Harry hated him, and was, therefore, sure his ideas were wrong, because they were Jim's.

It was when on his way home from his fourth visit to table rock that Jim met Mary Warren. She told him she was going to Boorana, and walking for the sake of the exercise. Several times after he met her. To him it seemed perfectly natural. Harry saw them on two occasions; to him it appeared as a deliberate plot to deprive him of the woman he loved.

He went home and sought Kate, who saw by his scowl that something was seriously amiss. She looked sympathetic.

"Look here, Kate, that blackguard, Smith, is always hanging round Mary, and I can't keep her away from him," he whined.

Kate looked at him with a steely gleam in her eyes, and a sudden pull at her heart. The first surprised Harry; the second herself.

"What do you mean exactly?" she asked quietly.

"Exactly what I say," he snapped. "He's always hanging round the Table Hill, and meeting Mary as he goes home."

"How far is it from Warren's?"

"Two miles."

"How far is it from here?"

"A quarter of a mile," said Harry, looking puzzled.

"Well, if he wanted to hang round Mary, would he go to the Table Hill?"

Harry looked enlightened.

"He must know when she's coming to see you, and waylays her, the brute."

"How often does she come here?"

"What are you driving at now?" blurted Harry in a sudden fit of temper.

Kate grew more cautious.

"Do you go and see Mary often?" she asked with a sudden softening of her voice.

"As often as I am on their side of our place."

"You take her in as part of your ordinary business, I see. Are you very fond of Mary, Harry?" He blushed furiously, feeling at the same time inclined to lose his temper again.

"What are you driving at this time?" he asked.

"Are you such a blockhead as to think Mary does not know you only call to see her when it fits your business in the paddocks?"

The light of quick hope sprang into his face.

"Do you think, then, she's piqued because I don't think more of her than my work, and—and is playing him off against me? Why, Kate, I think I'd lose all my interest in the property if it wasn't for the thought of her." There was a quite new dignity in him as he spoke. Then he looked at his sister with a mild wonder.

"I wonder where you got that head of yours, Kate? You usen't to seem so quick with it."

"Yours isn't up to much," said Kate, enigmatically.

Nearly every day after his talk with Kate, Harry had work to do near the Warrens' boundary, and he found Mary kind. He was also nearly beside himself with joy, and was able to speak—even to think—charitably of Smith's intelligence; the more so as Mary seemed quite pleased with him when he did. It gave him such a feeling of superiority that in a way he took Mary under his wing, and flustered fussily about the danger to young ladies from free thinking young men who came into the country, and turned the minds of simple maidens from the paths of accustomed thoughts about sheep and fences.

Mary listened with her face illumined by a bright smile, which Harry wofully misinterpreted. She led him on till he almost began to think she was too fond of him—if such a thing were possible. His mother saw his elation, and was happy in his pleasure. His father only saw that one part of his property was well looked after, and vaguely wondered why Harry left to the stockman so

much of the rest of it. The stockman, Jack, was a reliable man, born on the property before Mr. Horeton bought it. It was Jack who had taken Harry out on his first pony ride, and was nearly always with him when Harry was out on the run. Jack had also taught the girls to ride, and all the bush lore they knew. He was devoted to them, and many a time helped them when they went out on their madcap rides by intercepting them on the way home, to prevent their being found out by their mother. But Jack was unprejudiced in his views of Harry's sentimental relations with Mary, and he knew a great deal more of Mary's conduct than any member of the family; but had the invaluable quality of being able to say nothing till he was asked. Kate he always answered freely when she questioned him, and Kate learnt that, though Mary did not meet Smith near the house, she met him pretty often a mile nearer the township, where Harry was scarcely likely to see her. Out of consideration for Nell's future, Kate determined their meetings should be stopped, for she had an instinctively feminine idea that if a woman besieged long enough, the fortress would capitulate.

## CHAPTER XIII.

It was with genuine respect that Harry listened to Kate laying down the law on how to court a woman. First of all, she got him to talk about himself. When he finished she asked—

"How old are you now, Harry?"

"Nearly 20."

"I suppose you would like to marry and settle down."

"Rather," said Harry, drawing himself up.

"How do you think mother would take to your marrying?"

He looked a little nonplussed.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't really know; you see, I always give way so much to mother that I think that she ought fairly to give way to me for once."

A fleeting smile slipped across Kate's face. Not understanding, Harry ignored it, as was usual with him when he did not understand.

"But what if she refused?" asked Kate.

"Well, you know, I have £300 a year of my own; so perhaps it wouldn't matter."

"Of course, I forgot that; so you can marry at once. Have you asked her yet?"

"No; but it doesn't matter when, I think."

"You are very young, Harry."

"What!" he exclaimed.

"You are looking at it from your point of view," explained Kate. "She may think it does matter when," she added.

"How do you know?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Am I not a woman, too," she said, looking sphinx-like.

"I'll drop in and ask her to-morrow," said Harry.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Kate. "That is, if you want her to say yes."

"What difference does it make if she cares?"

"That has very little to do with it. All she wants to know is that you care, and vastly, too."

"Surely she knows that."

"But she wants all the world to know it, too."

"And doesn't it?"

"Of course; but she wants the world to see it."

"Oh, I see. I must send round a crier with a bell to collect all the neighbours within 20 miles; then drop on my knees and propose in front of 'em all." They still used the bell in announcing entertainments in Boorana.

"You'll do something more romantic and less theatrical," said Kate.

"And what's that?"

"You'll get mother to give a ball—we'll manage the rest."

"What are you up to now?"

"Only trying to get Mary for you."

"I can't see it."

"Did you ever wonder why balls and parties and picnics were given?"

"For the fun of them, of course."

Kate looked at him sadly.

"Do you remember when Tom Welstrom, Jane Warren, and several others were engaged?"

"Well?"

"Don't you recollect their engagements were announced immediately after dances?"

Harry looked intelligent again.

"But why was a ball necessary?" he asked.

"It wasn't; but it gives the thing an air of family approval. It is mostly the eligible who are asked—the ineligible are put there for form's sake. Then, you see, everything looks respectable and proper, with the family approbation understood. Besides, girls love dances; they pay as matrimonial speculations."

"Does mother know that?" He was looking at Kate with a kind of awe. He was a very serious young man.

"I don't know; but it will please you, you know."

"Where does the romantic come in, anyhow?"

"In the mystery, the music, the lights, and the more or less certainty of something important happening out of several possibilities—Smith and you, for instance."

"Smith," said Harry, frowning.

"Yes; you remember how attentive he was to Nell at

the tennis party? There are several visitors at Welstroms, too, and young Solomon at the bank."

Nell came out and joined them; Kate turned to her and said—

"Harry is going to try and get mother to give a dance, Nell, to see if you can't capture Solomon."

"How lovely; do you think you can manage it, Harry?"

"Manage to get Sol.? You'll have to do that."

Nell blushed.

"The dance, I meant, not that—that——"

"Out with it, Nell," said Harry.

"Really, I don't know what to call him, except a mosquito."

"So he's stung you, has he?" laughed Harry.

"Don't be silly; he's only buzzed a bit."

Kate looked surprised.

"When, Nell."

"When I've been in the township by myself. I didn't think it worth telling."

Harry winked.

"That looks serious," said Kate, solemnly.

Harry laughed uproariously, which brought his mother out, who ordered the girls back to their work. It was a week before Harry broached the subject of a dance.

"I say, mother," he said, one Sunday, when he was sprawling in a cane verandah chair, "how'd you like young Solomon for a son-in-law?"

"What do you mean, my boy?" she asked, looking at him quickly.

"He's buzzing round Nell."

Mrs. Horeton looked annoyed.

"I must stop that nonsense; Solomon is worth nothing but his beggarly salary."

Harry laughed.

"I say, mother, don't you think the girls are looking a bit washed out?"

"I never noticed it."

"They work pretty hard, don't they?"

"No harder than I did when I was their age."

"But you were married at 20. Kate's 23, and Nell's 22 next month. Wouldn't you like to see them married?"

"Who on earth would want to marry them, I'd like

to know?" Then, thinking of Solomon—"Worth their having," she added.

"Lots, I think, for they're rather good looking. Don't you notice how they attract a lot of attention from the men they meet sometimes?"

"I've never seen it. If they——"

"It's all right, mother; they meet 'em fair and square at Welstrom's, Warren's, and the other places since you let 'em off the chain a bit. Didn't you notice how Nell attracted the new bank clerk the other day?"

"I don't like that man," said Mrs. Horeton, irrelevantly.

"He's rich, and, therefore, worth having—at least, they say so."

"Well."

"Nell might get him with a little help from you."

Mrs. Horeton looked suddenly thoughtful. She remembered her own suggestion to her husband. Harry's fitted in with it perfectly. She had noticed Smith seemed very attentive to Nell. That Harry was peculiarly candid in his ideas and their expression did not seem to strike Mrs. Horeton. He yawned. It was not his custom to think much of the future prospects of his sisters, and he found it rather tiring; still, on this occasion they happened to run in line with his own, so he exerted himself on their behalf a little more.

"They want some fun to liven 'em up, and so do I. Give a dance, mother."

"Good heavens! my boy; think of the expense."

"Oh! bother. I'll pay."

"I'll think it over," said Mrs. Horeton reflectively Harry rose and went away quite pleased with his ingenuity, and began his usual air-castle.

It was not till a fortnight afterwards that Mrs. Horeton told the girls they were to have a ball on Nell's next birthday. Nell was so astonished that she couldn't even thank her mother; then looked at Kate's quiet face with a slight suspicion. Kate only smiled at her.

It was hard to say whether the four families were not as astonished as Nell when they received the neatly printed invitations for the 7th of November. A dance at Horeton's had never taken place within the memory

of their oldest member; but it started them hazarding many guesses, all commendable for their ingenuity, but all very wide of the real truth, which was known only to Kate Horeton, and she had every reason to be silent. But the four families unanimously agreed that to honour Nell's birthday was the very last reason in the world for the dance.

As is not unusual, the innocent cause of the stirring of the Horetons was the least interested in the motives of his invitation, and spent much time in wondering why Solomon looked everything but what his name implied. And could not understand why an invitation to a dance should cause him cheerfully to blunder into so many clerical errors, which subsequently kept him working two hours overtime, still cheerful, with Smith's begrudged help. Jim got impatient enough to believe a fellow with the name of Solomon was meant by nature for a fool, and the name an object-lesson in irony.

When the 7th of November came, Solomon took so long dressing that he and Jim were amongst the last to arrive; and he was so shaky in putting up the horse that they were the last to enter; then he became fearfully nervous, and when he saw that Nell was not standing beside her mother, he became correspondingly depressed. For fear of looking at Kate, and looking self-conscious, Jim got very interested in Solomon's antics, and was scarcely aware of Kate's greeting, for which he blamed Solomon. But on glancing at her half a second afterwards he thought he understood in a flash why Solomon was unhappy. Kate looked so stately in some warm cloured dress, and so warmly beautiful, that the accountant must have overwhelmingly felt his insignificance.

"The little puppy," thought Jim; "he's spoony on her."

Then he saw Kate looking at him with that peculiar directness which seemed perfectly unconscious, and was so extremely puzzling to him. He was not used to that kind of look from women; it seemed to see too much. He avoided it by seeking Mary Warren and her more veiled face. Her manner and expression he always comprehended, for he had seen it in hundreds of women who were very like Mary.

To Jim the dance was just the same as dozens of

others, with minor differences, for which he accounted by the difference of place and individuals. The music was the township band of four performers; the cornet was not more than half a tone flat, sometimes a quarter; the violin was passable; the piccolo couldn't keep away from a squeak in its top notes; while the 'cello had a distinct wheeze in its low notes; but the musicians helped to cover each others' deficiencies manfully, so that to the Horeton girls, who had never heard the simplest orchestration before, the music was suggestive of all romance, and a revealing of every mystery of sensuous joy. Fortunately, no one had a sufficiently sensitive ear to be pained. To Mrs. Horeton it brought a feeling of sadness, suggesting something missed in life. When it played an old English ballad as a waltz, her memory flew back to a midland English village, to when she was a girl of 16, and heard the glee singers carolling it the last winter she spent in England; and for the first time in 30 years she felt her eyes wet with unshed tears. But they quickly dried when she saw Harry dancing with Mary Warren and looking at her with unmistakable adoration in his eyes. Her soft memory vanished in bitterness as she recognised that a stronger and deeper feeling was entering his life than his love for his mother. Then, looking at Smith, she noted with a kind of envy his strong face, marred by its slightly ennuye expression, which she resented as a slight on the trouble taken with the dance.

As the time wore on, some of the chaperons felt the lilt of the music creep through their blood till it reached their feet; then they began dancing, too. Even Mr. Horeton showed its influence by awkwardly swaying in a corner by himself, with his hands in his pockets, and humming unconsciously. Mrs. Warren looked on with some pride, knowing that her experience and suggestions to Kate were the principal means to the success of the ball. She also was thinking of long ago, of other balls when she was young. The stiffness of the young people gradually passed away. Then the heads of the four families—excepting Mrs. Warren—ceased to be critical; even to commend, as the influence of wine, youth, and laughter, and light made them young again. Nell was in Elysium. She gave four dances to the melancholy Solomon, think-

ing they were only two. She was besieged by young men and old, listened to more compliments in six hours than she had heard in twenty years; while her creamy face was radiant and her blue eyes were sparkling. If she had only been small, she would have been the perfection of a fairy sprite; instead, she was something better —the most perfectly happy girl in the most perfect dance ever given. She was so grateful for her pleasure that, without premeditation, she went and kissed her astonished father. To his uneasy surprise, he saw that his daughters were the handsomest women in the room. It came as a kind of shock, and he began to think and think, till his head drooped rather sadly. He scarcely knew he had daughters, except when his meals were late, or something was wrong with the domestic arrangements.

Kate was living two lives—one in the wants of the guests. She was the real hostess. The other in a vague dream, in which she could only remember having danced with Smith three times, and in the last of them gliding into a state of abstracted elation, which remained with her till the ball was over. When Mary Warren came to say good-bye she kissed Kate effusively, and, nodding in Jim's direction, she said, with a careless air—

"Doesn't he dance divinely?"

But Kate saw her watching furtively, and casually answered, "Yes."

"He's the handsomest man in the room," said Mary.

"Yes," said Kate, indifferently, and saw that Mary was not satisfied. She did not know Mary had discovered a change in Jim after he had danced with her. But when Mary had gone, Kate went and washed the kiss from her cheek savagely.

She was beginning to awaken.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Kate and Nell were up betimes the next morning, for a dance was not a thing Mrs. Horeton would allow to interfere with the work of the day. It was more the inveterate force of habit than any intention to be unkind. She awakened a sadder woman than when she fell asleep, for she instantly remembered her son's adoring face turned to Mary the night before, and resented the merry spirits of Nell, who flitted rapidly about her work, singing happily. Kate, too, was full of the dreamy joy of the night before, working as quickly as Nell, though more silently.

It was a bright, sunny morning, with the magpies chortling gleefully, the swallows wheeling gracefully and cheeping, and tomtits cheekily hopping on to the verandah in search of stray insects. There was a gentle breeze blowing into the house off the plains, bringing with it the soughing of the gum trees, the bleating of young lambs, the contented lowing of the cattle, and the fresh, earthy smell of the grass after a dew, for it was still springtime.

Everything harmonised in some subtle way with Kate's dreaminess, and, having an unoccupied moment, she walked into the sunlight brightening the north end of the verandah, and gazed unseeingly at the Table Hill, feeling the warmth and brilliancy, and drinking of some deep well of elation which was pleasant and inexplicable, too deep for words, yet as real as the budding, springing life around her. Nell came out, and brought her back to the needs of hungry men, and the realities of every-day life. But it did not in any way disturb the brooding serenity of Kate's mood. Nell chatted gaily of all the incidents of the dance, made fun of Solomon's nervousness, mixing household talk with comments on dresses, humming snatches of the airs remembered here and there —too absorbed in her own light-heartedness to see that Kate listened without hearing, and that her mother was sad and gloomy. They were a remarkable contrast, with

Nell and her mother at the extremes of a feeling of which Kate held the balance by sympathy with her mother's sadness and Nell's happiness.

Yet Kate felt the touch of melancholy only deepened and strengthened her sense of supreme joy.

At breakfast Harry failed to appear. They thought he must be still asleep. His mother went to call him; she returned to say he was not there. They saw him striding rapidly across the paddock in front of the house. When he entered he glared angrily at Kate.

"Where have you been, my boy?" asked his mother.

"To the township for the mail," he growled.

"How did you sleep?" she asked, noticing he was looking rather white and worn.

"Haven't been to bed," he answered. He sat down and ate silently for a few moments.

"Did you drive Mary Warren home?" asked his mother, with unusual timidity.

"No; Smith did." He helped himself to an omelette; then, looking savagely at Kate again, he said—

"They say in the township Smith is engaged to Mary Warren."

"I thought he had better taste," said Nell.

Mrs. Horeton looked immensely relieved.

Kate saw the room spin round her, then suddenly stand still.

She had awakened.

. . . . . .

After breakfast Harry started off on his rounds of the paddocks. Reaching the main road running into the hills in the northern valley of Table Hill, he saw a road mender at work, and when he came within hearing, heard him using an unbroken string of bad language to the horses pulling the scoop. The man was old, and swore with the fluency of long practise, almost tiredly, as if even swearing did not matter much. Harry was in the mood to be critical, which he kept mostly for others.

"Look here, Jackson, you don't know what women might hear you cursing on a public road like that. Shut up!"

Jackson pulled up his horses slowly, pushed back his

wrecked hat, then, carefully taking the tip of his nose between his finger and thumb, he asked—

"What am I saying, heh?"

"Everything you shouldn't. My mother may be along here presently, and I don't want her to hear you."

Jackson changed the hands on his nose.

"All right, Horeton," he said, pulling on his hat. Then, turning to his horses, he picked up the reins.

"GET up, you blank—blank—blanky blanks."

Harry turned white with temper.

"What the devil do you mean?" he shouted.

Jackson deliberately pulled up his horses again, and looked at Harry with mild surprise.

"Mean by what?" he drawled.

"By swearing like that again."

"Was I swearin'?" he asked, blankly, scratching the back of his head absent-mindedly, and tilting his hat on to his nose. "I'm blowed if I knew; 'm sorry." Pulling his hat on, he turned to the horses once more.

"GET oop, yer blanky, etc., etc."

Harry looked at him venomously. He thought it was a deliberate insult. Jackson was only an inebriate in curses. . Instead of laughing, Harry rode on fuming. Picking up the stockman, he rode round the padocks with him all day, the stockman expecting him to break down into one of his childish fits of uncontrollable temper, which often ended in his shouting, screaming and thrashing his horse mercilessly if it made a mistake. But the horse was thoroughly trained, and made no mistakes. Then Jack saw it was something unusually serious, and wondered when he would have to trip the "young boss" up, and sit on his stomach till he recovered.

Riding homewards in the dusk, and passing Table Hill, they saw a figure on the rock, blackly silhouetted against the red western sky.

"Can't you keep those dawdlers and idlers from coming on to the place, they'll start a bush fire again?"

"That's Smith, the new bank clerk, he never lights a fire," said Jack.

"Damn you, doesn't he smoke?"

Jack saw a vindictive gleam spring into Harry's eyes, as he continued—

"I'll go and tell him to shunt myself. You go round, I'll send the horse down, and follow when I've kicked that fellow off the place."

"Not much," said Jack, "I want to see the fun."

Quietly grinning, he followed. Harry cantered on ahead.

Smith turned on hearing horse's hoofs, and, when near enough, saw by Harry's face that he was up to mischief. He pulled himself together, and quietly lit his pipe.

"That's just what I've come to speak to you about," said Harry. "I suppose you know the danger of smoking in these paddocks?"

"I do when they're dry," answered Smith.

"They're quite dry enough to be dangerous now. Put that pipe out."

Jim coolly struck another match. Harry flushed.

"Do you know you're on private property, and have no right here, anyhow?" He dismounted quickly as he spoke. Then, looking round to see that Jack was not within hearing, he went up close to Jim, and said, "I mean this, Mr. Smith, that you're a beastly, sneaking crawler, and if you don't promise me now that you'll stop visiting a certain house we both know, I am going to kick you off this property." It was primitive, but Harry was never more honest in his life.

"You're a frightful fool, Horeton. And, even if I knew your right to the request, I'd refuse it demanded like that."

"I've every right, for I've been tacitly engaged to that girl ever since she was 16." He was not quite so honest this time. Jim looked surprised.

"Poor little beggar," he said.

"Who?" shouted Harry, beginning to lose control of himself.

"The girl, of course."

Harry saw a blood-red mist in front of his eyes.

"You cursed, canting hypocrite." He raised the loaded stock whip. Smith hit him between the eyes before the handle could descend, which sent him staggering backwards. Harry dropped the whip and rushed at Jim with his hands beating like flails, and open like

claws ,as if intending to tear and bite to gratify his vicious passion. He was quite at the mercy of Jim, had he chosen to take advantage of Harry's blind fury, but he was too disgusted to seriously hit him again. Jack saw that Harry was beyond himself, and at Jim's mercy. He ran and tripped Harry up, then coolly sat on his stomach, ducking his head to avoid having it kicked; while Harry raved and swore in a manner that might have shamed Jackson. But he was just as unconscious of it.

"I think you'd better go away, Mr. Smith, he gets these tantrums sometimes. He'll be all right in five minutes if you're not here."

Jack was looking a little disgusted too.

"I think he's mad," said Jim. "Can I give you any help?"

"Only by leaving him to me."

"All right. I'm awfully sorry this has occurred." As he went away he heard Jack talking soothingly to Harry, who sobbed and raved alternately, till Jim was out of hearing. Then he began wondering why Harry should make such a fuss over a homely woman like Mary Warren.

The whole business made him a little bitter. He began to think Mary had been up to some feminine tricks with Harry, but, not seeing any tangible reason for the idea, he thought more charitably of her, and then of Harry.

"Jealous of me, the fool, and he w——" He did not finish the sentence, even to himself. Then his fancy leapt pleasantly to the ball of the previous night; to the memory of the tall, glowing-headed woman, swaying rythmically with his arm round her waist. Though unpractised, she was too well-built to dance awkwardly—her eyes shining with an inward light, her warm, creamy skin glowing with health. He impatiently flicked the heads of the kangaroo grass, and sighed.

"Well, I suppose this quarrel puts an end to all that."

. . . . . .

Jack told Kate of Harry's quarrel with Smith. It was then Kate knew Mary had rejected Harry the previous night, and, what was more important, it convinced her that Jim was engaged to Mary.

## CHAPTER XV.

Jim was a perfectly honest man, as far as he knew himself, and prevarication was beyond his deliberate will. Feeling restless when he got back to the hotel, he sat down and wrote this letter to his aunt—

"It is just a month since I came here, and I have found many things to interest me, of which the most interesting is the bank manager. He is a character—I won't say he is a Scotchman, for I have a rather high opinion of that race; but he has taught me many things I never knew or dreamt were part of a bank clerk's education. I suppose being in the country makes him think of my future career as a country bank manager, in a place where labour may be scarce, so I have a glimmering of understanding of why he teaches me to milk a cow and to groom a horse. But it seems he has higher ideas of my future, as he also instructs me in the mysteries of watching the baby. I wonder what sort of baby I was, mum? Your hair, I notice, is still brown, but so is Mrs. Grant's; in my own I see certain signs of it growing grey—it is nearly always creeping with terror. I do not want to cast reflections on either Mr. or Mrs. Grant, but their youngest is the son of a devil. I have seen lots of babies, but never came into contact with one before, and, consequently, had a high opinion of a sentimental kind of their necessity for a nation's welfare. For the first time I also understand the need of lunatic asylums. Don't think I am mad yet, mum; but I can't open a door, or go anywhere about the bank, without tripping over that baby, who says "Goo" with a chortle when I nearly break my neck to avoid breaking his, and shrieks with rage like a tin-horn demon if I only graze my shin.

"I met a curious old chap here, or, rather, he met me by coming into the bank, and recognised me as the son of my father, and wanted to know what I was doing in the bank. Everybody knows, apparently, who I am, and

all guess I have more money than that I should work for a living—what a low-minded crowd they are, too, for they are all ridiculously surprised to see me work when I need not. Fortunately, I find I have very little trouble in evading their questions, for they are also mean enough to think I would not be such a fool.

"There are some rather nice, simple people, though, here, too. They are trying to imitate the English 'county family' style, but it is such a queer imitation that it is more amusing than interesting—except in one family, who are themselves or nothing. They are named Horeton. I can't quite make them out. There are two girls and a boy. He is a cub unlicked. The girls are remarkably pretty—at least, I think so; and from what I saw in London, the elder girl would create quite a furore if she appeared there as a professional beauty. I would like to describe her 'points' in detail—that's what they say here—but I don't think it would interest you. She is a very simple-minded girl, with nothing to puzzle one" —Jim put down his pen, and sat back. Then he picked it up again, and chewed the handle to fibre. She did nothing else but puzzle him. He suddenly jabbed his pen into the well, and wrote rapidly—"except her very simplicity; it is marvellous. There is another girl here, Mary Warren. She goes often to the city, and knows a thing or two; can discuss the governors intelligibly, has a large acquaintance with genealogies, speaks about some people not being her 'style,' and, in fact, has all the usual frothy distinctions of the wealthy lower orders. Being one of them, I get on with her splendidly, for I can always tell, almost to a word, her reply to any question I may put. When I want to be quiet for a think, I start her on reminiscences of the wealthy crowd in Melbourne. But the worst of it is, young Horeton misunderstands our friendship, and has done me the honour of being extremely jealous—has tried to give me some trouble, and only made a disgraceful fool of himself. It seems part of the Horeton simplicity, and he is so remarkably simple that I would not be surprised if he tried to pot me from behind a tree. Don't be alarmed, mum; I *say* this only, but as he has really nothing to be

jealous about, he will soon find it out, and then things will run smoothly for him again.

"You say you would like to come up and see me. I would rather you put it off for a week or two, for this place is rather rough for one accustomed to comfort, as you are, in spite of your early-day experiences.

"I shall speak to Mary Warren about young Horeton, and get her to put him right; they were playmates from their babyhood. I think she has a sneaking regard for him, is a sensible girl in spite of her society airs, I believe, and undoubtedly too experienced to mistake the nature of my intentions—we're too friendly——"

Jim put down his pen and read his letter through, and was startled to see the sudden reversion to Horeton's jealousy, and the words matrimonial intentions were far more often in his mind than on the paper.

"Now, I wonder why I go so often to Table Hill?" he asked himself, and replied—"For the sake of the view."

But to go to a hill with matrimonial intentions seemed an absurd anti-climax. Then thought regretfully how rarely he saw Kate when he went to see the view. He took up his pen again, and, much to his surprise, found his ideas had gone astray. He tried several starts—they all looked wrong.

"Better go for a walk," he muttered. He finished the letter conventionally, sealed and stamped it; then put on his hat.

It was Saturday afternoon, and 4 o'clock in the post-office, as he passed. He went straight for the track leading to Table Hill, never even giving other localities a thought. At every turn he saw the vision of a glowing-headed woman, with a Venus of Milo chin, glancing with calm, direct-looking eyes into his, slowly stirring his soul till he was lost in a feeling of unearthly elation.

. . . . . .

Just as Jim started for his afternoon walk Mrs. Warren and Mary came out and sat on their verandah. Mrs. Warren was looking serious, Mary had a deep line between her eyebrows, and every vestige of the innocent young girl had left her face. She looked what she was—a passionate woman.

"I tell you, Mary, you're playing a risky game; men

are not fools, even Harry, though he appears to be one; and in spite of the nonsense they talk about love, marriage is just as serious to them as to us. It makes or breaks them. If you keep on playing off these two men against each other, you'll probably lose both."

It was a bit inconsequential, but Mrs. Warren was thinking far more of her daughter than her words.

"But I don't want Harry, mother."

"Yet you've been encouraging him since you were a girl of fourteen."

"I have often thought that I cared for him, and I suppose the habit will stick to me, even if—if——"

"That's only an excuse to take him on again if you should not get Smith. Well, I advise you to give up any idea of getting him."

"He's not engaged."

"But I think he's likely to be. Haven't you observed his altered manner whenever Kate is near him?"

"She scarcely ever sees him," said Mary.

"All the more reason for him to think of her."

Mary's face went a little harder; the lines between her eyebrows deepened and lengthened.

"I've sometimes thought he cared for her, but could never make quite certain."

"You told me he goes often to the Table Hill. What do you think he goes there for?"

"I've sometimes thought it was to see Kate; but when I have met him returning, I always found out he had never seen her."

"It's reported that Smith is engaged to you. How did the rumour get about?"

"Because we've been seen together very often, I suppose. You know these beastly little country townships."

"You'd better let Harry understand that it isn't true, or it may lead to trouble; you know what a hot-headed fool he is."

"And you want me to marry him?"

"Nothing of the sort, but I don't want you to be a fool over Smith."

Mary for a moment looked very like crying.

"Harry asked me to marry him on the night of the Horetons' dance."

Mary paused. Mrs. Warren looked up quickly.

"I refused him——"

"Well?"

"He made a fuss, and wanted to know if I cared for anyone else. More to quieten him than anything else, I said yes." Her mother sniffed ever so slightly. "He said he'd kill Smith if ever I married him."

"What did you say?"

"I only laughed at him."

"What did he do?"

"He became very quiet, and went back to the ballroom; then I guessed it was all right."

"Is it all right?"

"I don't quite know—have you seen Matheson this morning, mother?"

Matheson was her boundary rider.

"What's that got to do with the matter?"

"He told me that yesterday Jack prevented Harry killing Smith on Table Hill."

Jack had one prejudice in favour of the Horetons.

"Good heavens, girl! Did Matheson know the cause of the quarrel?"

"He said it was because Smith was smoking on the dry grass of Horeton's paddocks."

Mrs. Warren looked relieved.

"But Matheson says there is no dry grass on Horeton's property yet," continued Mary.

"Then he knows."

"He guesses there is something else at the bottom of it."

"Is that why he told you?"

"Yes, I think."

They had nothing more to say on the matter, as they both began to think alike, and sat silently staring at the hills, with a sense of evil overshadowing them, which they were helpless to avoid, yet foreseeing a crisis in the life of Mary, which both the mother and daughter brooded over without pleasure—the mother more hopeless than the daughter. But when something did happen, it fell upon those who had anticipated it least, who that day were thinking gaily of a joyous present, full of promise of a happy future.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Quite unaware of what Mrs. Warren and Mary were saying, and tranquilly unaware that Smith was not half a mile away on his way to Table Hill, Mrs. Horeton also sat on the verandah, with a pleasanter feeling in her heart than it had known for a long time. She was busily knitting a pair of woollen socks for Harry. Of course, he would some day marry, she was thinking, but not yet; he was too young, and still needed her motherly care. Who of the young girls she saw around her would look upon knitting socks as a mere recreation of loving care? She smiled grimly to herself as her memory recalled the few young women she knew, and the many she knew by repute. Then there were her own girls. There would be plenty of time for them to settle down when Harry was married. Thinking of them brought a slight frown to her face. She had vaguely noticed that Harry and Kate were much more friendly than was their wont, or at least so it seemed. Then there was the alteration in Harry's manner towards outsiders; for as such she thought were all visitors, from the Warrens to the acquaintances of yesterday. His attitude towards them once reflected her's. She tried to remember whether Harry's change came before or after his new intimacy with Kate. A faint suspicion was entering her mind; but the habit of regarding Kate and Nell as mere means to the end of Harry's comfort discountenanced the idea that Kate might be influencing him. It was probably the other way about, and she was indefinably pleased with the idea; for mastery of any kind is what all mothers love in their sons. Looking up casually towards the entrance gate a mile across the paddock, she saw a horseman enter and come towards the house, and was surprised when she saw it was Harry—it was not his usual time to return from the paddocks. When he reached her, her quick eyes saw that he was in a harsh

mood. Not knowing or refusing to believe that Mary Warren was the cause, she put it down to some trouble with the stock or men. She called Nell to make some tea, and tried to soothe him in her usual manner by unremitting attention. It had no effect—it seemed to bore him.

"What's the matter, my son?" she asked, after watching him staring moodily at the ground for some time.

"Nothing," he answered shortly, and, rising, he began pacing restlessly up and down the verandah.

"Where's Kate?" he asked at last.

"She's inside at the sewing machine."

Harry went in to her. Presently he came out and said—

"I'm going for a walk with Kate, mother; we'll be home for tea."

They left by the back way. Mrs. Horeton went to the end of the verandah, and saw them walking up the gully to the south of Table Hill. It was their private track. They were a couple of paces apart, apparently deeply interested in what they were saying, for Harry did not look back in his customary way to see if his mother were watching him. She felt a small pang of jealousy, but forgot it in her interest in watching him till he was out of sight; then went back to her work. She soon became absorbed in musing on Harry's future—on its promise of wealth and happiness. Suddenly she noticed the sun was getting low. Looking across the paddocks with a start, she saw a knot of men just coming round the north shoulder of Table Hill. That was the way visitors to the hill generally returned. It was apparently a picnic party returning to the township. Wondering why Harry and Kate were late, she returned to her knitting. Then she heard the distant sound of a horse galloping, and saw a horseman riding furiously towards the township.

"Riding the poor brute to death," she muttered, believing it was one of the township people out for a half-holiday, and taking his money's worth out of the horse. Then, glancing casually at the knot of men, noticed they were bunched very closely. Again she went on with her

knitting; but kept them in the field of her vision. With a throb of alarm she saw them turn off the road, and take the track to the house. Rising hastily, with fear at her heart—fear of some accident to a stranger—it might have been Harry. Then she saw a stretcher supported on the shoulders of the men. One of them mounted a horse he was leading, and cantered towards her, whom she presently saw was her husband.

"Wants me to get some things ready; the other man must be off for the doctor." Then she saw Kate walking beside the stretcher—her head bent. Kate always walked upright.

"There must be something wrong with—with—Harry." She hesitated, even in thinking his name.

When Mr. Horeton reached her, his face was terribly white and drawn with mental agony. Dismounting, he walked slowly, as if in pain. She seemed to feel every drop of blood in her body rush to her heart, which throbbed with agony, and made her speechless.

"Come inside, wife," said her husband, gently. She stood statue-like, questioning him with a glance, then looking at the stretcher-bearers.

"It's Harry," he said, "and badly hurt. Come inside, wife."

"My place is here," she said, suddenly finding her voice. When the men came nearer and saw her, they slowed down, almost stopping.

"Is—is—is he dead?" she asked, turning to her husband.

"Come inside," he repeated.

"My place is here," she said, with sudden energy. Then she saw Smith detach himself from the knot of men and walk away. Her eyes fired. She had observed them talking to him, and with quick intuition connected him with the silent figure on the stretcher. The bearers stopped.

"Bring my son to me—here," she ordered, in a voice they instantly obeyed.

Kate took the opportunity to slip past her mother, giving her a terrified, shrinking glance as she passed.

The men came forward, and lowered the stretcher on to the verandah; then stepped back and looked away. Mrs. Horeton raised the coat off Harry's face, then fell on her knees beside the stretcher, wailing—

"My son. Oh! God, my son."

Harry was dead.

## CHAPTER XVII.

The first intimation that Boorana had of anything amiss with the Horetons was the galloping of a horse into the township. Everybody knew Jack, the stockman, and when they saw his set face they gathered into bunches in front of the shops, or bought soap and potatoes to a running fire of surmise and question. But when they saw the doctor's horse galloping back they almost lost interest in the prices of soap and potatoes. Purchasers did, anyway, who went out to swell the numbers in the bunches, and hoping to hear something definite from the stockman as he returned. When they saw him riding back at a walk, they watched him agape with curiosity, and when Mr. Grant went and spoke to him they waited impatiently for him to be done. When Grant left his face was very long; for a moment they were inclined to think there had been a heavy slump in the price of cows. But Jack's merry face looked too solemn, so they knew the matter was serious indeed. Then a visitor came out of the bank, and said a few words to the butcher. He passed them on to the baker, who called them to half a dozen men crossing the road—"Harry Horeton is dead," fled up and down the main street, slipped round corners into cross streets, till the words were picked up by the children, who shrilled out the news with a complete ignorance of its import. One after another the various shops put up a shutter in token of respect. It being Saturday afternoon, there were plenty of idlers in the township, who gathered together and tried to question the stockman; but he had told all he cared to tell or knew to Mr. Grant, and rode sturdily, sadly homewards.

Mr. Grant stood on his doorstep discussing the news at large with the leading business men of Boorana, who came and went, and still came and went, passing an awe-struck hour, gradually learning "That Smith had mur-

dered Horeton; that Horeton had tried to murder Smith; that Smith had nearly broken his neck in trying to prevent Horeton breaking his; that Horeton had broken his neck by accident; had committed suicide; had tried to make Smith commit suicide; that he had broken his neck in trying to prevent Smith committing suicide." But from their many ideas one stood up clearly, which was that there had been a quarrel between Smith and Horeton, which had ended in Harry's death—whether by accident or intention was unknown. They began to divide on the cause of the quarrel, till a woman and a bushfire divided the honours about equally. They frequently mentioned Mary Warren's name, for all had more or less frequently seen her with Smith, and all knew Horeton was in love with her. Then it was asserted that Smith had tried to fire Horeton's grass because Harry would not give Mary up to him, and that Harry had caught him in the act. They also began to wonder where Smith was, and to look up the road leading to Horeton's expectantly, and to stare at Table Hill with a new interest as it loomed up in the distance, now the landmark of a tragedy.

An hour and a half after they heard the news, Smith came into the township. Those who thought he had murdered Horeton felt a shock of surprise that he should be so impudently at large; while those who thought Harry's death an accident accepted Smith's appearance as proof of his innocence. As Jim passed he saw by their looks of interest, pity, and disgust that the news was amongst them. He shrank inwardly; but outwardly he walked as if he were not aware they knew. He went straight to his hotel—to his room, and shut the door.

Shortly after him came the stretcher-bearers, who instantly attracted a small crowd, eagerly questioning. All they could tell was that they had been called by Miss Horeton to her assistance, as her brother had fallen off the Table rock and hurt himself, and that Smith was holding Harry's head when they got there. But they were still under the influence of the heart-broken cry of Harry's mother as she sank on her knees beside her dead boy, and they were bitter against the man who had, unwittingly or otherwise, inflicted such terrible agony upon

her. Mrs. Horeton they cared nothing about personally —she was never popular with them—but a mother bereft of her only son was another matter; it appealed to a sympathy common to them all. The majority in Boorana began to glance up at Smith's window threateningly as the stretcher-bearers' emotions spread amongst them.

Still vague rumor grew vaguer; side issues crept gradually into the story, till the Horeton girls were painted as being restrained with difficulty from rushing into the township and wreaking a personal vengeance upon Smith. People kept coming in from the country round, who stood or sat listening agape to the news. By night, every man, woman, and child capable of understanding, knew that Harry Horeton was dead, and that Smith, the bank clerk, was in some way responsible. The four families sent over mesages of sympathy, asking if they could be of any assistance.

Mary Warren heard the news, and spent Sunday afternoon in calling on Mrs. Grant, from whom she heard every rumour and report, every guess and surmise, gathering slowly that, on the whole, public opinion was against Smith. At first Mary did not believe it was Harry who had been killed—she had every reason to believe it ought to have been the other way about. But, having heard all the township knew, and a little more, Mary betook herself thoughtfully homewards. Mrs. Warren was sitting in her bedroom in her dressing-gown when she arrived, and looked up from a letter to be surprised at the unusual solemnity of Mary's face. She had heard the news of Harry's death the night before, and was closely watching her daughter to see its effect upon her; but so far had seen nothing to rouse her sympathy for Mary.

There is always an element of the unknown in the keenest insight of a mother into her children's characters. Mrs. Warren was more than commonly sensible as a mother, and, therefore, recognised the existence of the unknown quantity in Mary more completely. From her talk about Harry's first quarrel with Smith on Table Hill, she recognised that now the crisis had come, and was wondering a little fearfully how Mary would come through it. Mary seemed strong enough to stand and

decide alone; yet she saw clearly that Mary did not realise the importance of Harry's death to her, and was not sure that she ever would.

Mary sat down beside her mother, and repeated in detail every rumour she had heard from Mrs. Grant. Then Mrs. Warren observed clearly that Mary was not particularly hurt by Harry's death. She was speaking as if relating the news of some disaster which had killed its thousands a thousand miles away. Mrs. Warren's thoughts flew to the heart-broken mother, and her eyes filled with tears of sympathy. She also had sons, of whose death other women might speak as Mary was of Harry's.

"Of course, they say that Mr. Smith killed Harry deliberately. I suppose you know that there are all sorts of rumours about Mr. Smith's father and old Horeton having been partners and quarrelled. Did you ever hear anything, mother?"

Mrs. Warren shook her head.

"They say Smith must be up to some mischief in trying to hide the fact, or evade it; and that the talk of his wealth is all humbug started by himself to give him the entree to places which wouldn't admit a poor man —like Horeton's, for instance. This quarrel has only confirmed those old croakers. They say Mr. Smith deliberately defied Harry in order to make him fight, then knocked him off the Table rock as if by accident."

"Did you actually hear these things said?" asked Mrs. Warren.

"Something which meant them. Mr. Smith seems rather deep. Of course, he knows all about the relation of his father with Horeton; but has kept quiet for purposes of his own."

"Why 'of course?'"

"Because a father always tells his son of his life."

"Does he?" said Mrs. Warren, doubtfully and ironically.

Mary ignored the irony and doubt together.

"Even if his father didn't, the servants or relations must have told him—servants always know such a lot, you know. Even if they haven't, the questioning of different people who remembered them in the old days

would have given him a hint—like old Harrison."

"Have you heard any other rumours?"

"Oh, yes. They say the quarrel was over me."

Mary did not get that from Mrs. Grant. Her mother was watching her narrowly. Mary did not seem to notice it.

"Do you know that Harry's death has, then, suspended a noose round Mr. Smith's neck?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I think I could remove it when the occasion arises."

"By being called as a witness, and giving evidence of what Harry said to you the night you refused him?"

"Yes."

"What about Kate, who was an eye-witness?"

"As his sister, they will look upon her as prejudiced against Smith."

"Do you think Mr. Smith cares for you?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think he cares for Kate Horeton?"

"That won't matter—now."

Mrs. Warren got a deeper glimpse into her daughter than that young lady ever suspected, and turned away with bitter disappointment in her face, on seeing which Mary stared at her with a look of amazement.

"What is wrong with you, mother?"

Mrs. Warren turned to her, and said with suppressed passion—

"You think you're very clever, my child; but you remember what I say. Harry's death is indirectly due to your heartless coquetting with him, and now you think you can play as easily with Mr. Smith and come out scathless. But you're going to badly burn your fingers."

"I don't want to play with him, mother," Mary answered, quietly. "But I shall make him so grateful to me that he will come to me himself."

Mrs. Warren cooled suddenly.

"I see you have an instinct for the dramatic. Do you think Mr. Smith is a fool?"

"Yes, I do; he's sentimental, and was fool enough to

be deceived by what he took to be Kate's simple naivete, and he is full of hazy social ideas about equality of opportunity—a man with his money! It wants only a strong claim on his gratitude, and he would be a slave to it all his life."

"I see, you would like the word gratitude and Mary Warren to be one and the same thing; and why are you angling for that simple young man so patiently?"

Mary got a little angry with her mother's irony this time.

"It's such a dull existence in this hole. I want a house and things of my own. Mr. Smith is a handsome fellow, worth getting apart from his wealth."

"But what if Kate wants him, too?"

"She's a fool, and doesn't count now that Smith has killed her brother."

"Doesn't she?" said Mrs. Warren, thoughtfully. "I see you have a high opinion of Smith's sense of gratitude—did you ever care for anyone?"

"I've sometimes thought I did."

"Did you ever care for Harry?"

"Not in the least—he was too much a mother's pet to ever make a decent husband. Besides, self-restraint in the passion of love has been the acme of my education—I'm going to make the restraint worth while."

"You'd better go to bed," said Mrs. Warren.

Mary went out, wondering why her mother looked so suddenly old.

"A common and vulgar intriguer," was Mrs. Warren's comment when Mary had gone; "and a daughter of mine, too."

She lay awake trying to think whence came this quality in Mary. Not being versed in theories, she could not explain, or muddle herself with theoretical explanations, which would never alter the fact even if they explained; and she saw it would be hopeless to try and influence Mary—that was knowledge from experience. All she could try to do was guard her against any serious harm, or moral stigma which might come to her through her cold-blooded perversity. Then Mrs. Warren lay still,

and suffered one of the penalties of being a mother.

But never in the rest of her life did she speak or think hardly of a fallen woman.

Mary suffered the penalty of being too clever; but that took her a long time to discover, when it did not matter, one way or the other.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Kate did not look at her mother after her one hasty glance. With her face white and her head bent, she walked quickly into the house. As for herself, she scarcely thought of how she felt, though she was aware of feeling a deep grief, for, after all, Harry was her only brother. But it was so mixed up with fear of her mother that she was inclined to think she was a heartless woman. The severity and the suddenness of the shock had numbed her mind like a blow on a nerve numbs a limb.

Inside she sought Nell instinctively, and found her busily preparing the evening meal. Nell held a dish of vegetables in her hand, as she turned on hearing Kate. She put it down, and without a word walked to her bedroom. It was a childish habit, carried into their womanhood, from the time they first sympathised with each other when in trouble. Kate followed and shut the door.

"What is it?" asked Nell.

"Harry's dead."

The tears sprang into Nell's eyes, while her mind ran rapidly to new adjustments.

"Does mother know? Poor mother!"

"She knows now," said Kate.

"Does father know?"

"He came home with us."

Nell did not ask how it happened—the fact, not the manner, was important for the present. She half sat, half lay on the bed, with her face on the pillow, crying softly; but, looking up, she saw Kate was dry-eyed and wretched.

"You were with him when it happened?" asked Nell.

"Yes; but mother does not know that yet."

They looked at each other fearfully.

"What'll she do?" asked Nell.

"I can't say; but I feel a little frightened. I wonder if she will go mad?"

Kate was very frightened. Nell dried her eyes.

If Mrs. Horeton had seen Nell's action, and all that it implied, in a calm moment, she might have gone mad—or become sane.

That Harry's death left them heiresses to a great property never entered their minds. They had but the vaguest ideas of the value of money, and even in their dreams of matrimony they indulged in no ideas of sensuous comfort, merely in freedom from the stern, domineering temper of their mother, and their subjection in her hands to Harry's whims. The freedom from one part of their slavery which Harry's death brought them was obvious. With it was no sordid thought; but they would sooner have remained slaves than free, with Harry dying as he did. Their first interchange of questions had only indicated to themselves more certainly what they expected.

In an hour Nell went out to give Jack, the stockman, his tea. Jack did not speak to her when he sat down—his way of respecting her sorrow. But he also knew that in reality they did not have much reason for grief, as he was quite well aware of the life they led from their mother through Harry. But he, too, was dreading its effect upon his mistress.

Yet he was curious as to how Harry had fallen, having been sought by Mr. Smith after the accident occurred, and had in turn found Mr. Horeton. When he finished his tea, he asked Nell if Kate had told her anything. She said Kate had not.

"Miss Kate is the only one who knows how he came by his death—and Mr. Smith."

Nell turned white. She remembered that Harry and Smith had quarrelled only a few days before.

"Was it another quarrel?" she asked; "and——"

"Don't get alarmed, Miss Nell. We all think it was some kind of accident, 'cause Smith's a decent chap, which I know from the last time he had a row with poor Mr. Harry."

His doubt alarmed Nell. It looked as if Jack thought there was another possibility beside accident. She pre-

pared a tray for her father. He was sitting in an arm-chair in the dining-room, with his head on his arms. A sudden gust of sympathy went through Nell's heart. She put down the tray, and put her arm round his neck. He looked up. In his face was more than grief—something akin to terror. The stockman's doubt rushed to Nell's mind with a new significance.

"Oh! father, wasn't it an accident?"

He shrank as she spoke; her words had formulated a suspicion he as yet dared not harbour, but which he dreaded in spite of himself. There was a fear growing within him that he was himself indirectly responsible for his son's death. If not an accident, it was a revenge so skilfully contrived that it struck him through his nearest and dearest, yet placed the striker almost beyond the reach of punishment through any legal process. The diabolical skill of the blow terrified him. As time passed, the conviction that Harry had been murdered grew, and with it conviction of Smith's immunity. On the way home Kate had told him there had been a fight, during which Harry had fallen off the Table rock and been killed by the fall. She said it was an accident, and was the only witness. But she was ignorant of his early connection with Smith's father. She had not told him she knew they were quarrelling over Mary Warren, so Mr. Horeton guessed it was over something very different—the rumour that had reached his ears that it was over Mary he put down as part of Smith's skill. Everything pointed to one conclusion only. He entirely overlooked the unknown factor of his own character, his conscience, which brought the conviction finally home to him.

He refused the food Nell brought rather roughly, she imagined. She did not feel hurt at it, for she had never been used to nice consideration of her feelings. As she left the dining-room, she heard her father begin to walk up and down restlessly. She told Kate what the stockman had said, and what her father appeared to suspect.

"I saw it all; it was an accident," said Kate.

Then they heard Mr. Horeton go into his wife's room;

then the low murmur of their voices hour after hour, sometimes rising a little, sometimes sinking so low as not to be heard at all. Towards daybreak they became altogether silent.

Next day the girls went about the house as quietly as possible. Inside it was as dark as drawn blinds and shutters could make it; outside it was bright and sunny. The sheep bleated on the hillsides, the horses neighed and galloped round the home paddock, the hens cackled and the cocks crowed as if nothing had happened. The men went about their work, with the excited sheep dogs running and barking at heel, with the idea that nothing in the world mattered but sheep. Even Harry's dogs went away with never a whine to show they missed him, and above it all the sun shone hotly in a cloudless sky. To the girls it was the same—and yet so different. This was their first experience of death.

After the doctor came and examined Harry, he had asked to see the girls, and, seeing they did not need his skill, left them with a glance of pity. He had a sneaking admiration for them, particularly Kate, and would have openly sympathised had he seen they wanted it. But they were dry-eyed, and he was a tactful man.

Mrs. Horeton puzzled him a little. She was sitting on Harry's vacant bed, stony-eyed and silent; she had looked at the doctor, obviously without seeing him, yet with an appearance of intense, thoughtful concentration that was entirely free from any outward suggestion of grief. Her hands occasionally gave a nervous, spasmodic twitch, in which her fingers opened and spread like talons; then shut rapidly. Her grief was evidently not of the ordinary kind; there was something sullenly resentful about it; while her eyes were bright enough to suggest a touch of insanity. The doctor told Mr. Horeton to have her put to bed. It was after she was in bed that the girls heard their mother and father talking so excitedly and so long.

On Sunday all the countryside seemed to be in front of Horeton's house. They came in buggies, on horseback, and on foot, talked in a subdued way about sheep, and death, and the weather, glancing furtively at the

grey-headed, bowed old man, taking his absorption rightly for intense sorrow.

In the evening, when the house was free again, the girls were able to sit down quietly; while their thoughts turned to the silent, darkened room which hid their mother. Kate trembled a little, which showed her the need of pulling herself together. In the silence and darkness they waited.

## CHAPTER XIX.

It was midnight when Mrs. Horeton entered Kate's room. Nell was asleep. Kate sat up with a frightened start. Her mother beckoned silently. Mrs. Horeton led the way to the dining-room. They were both in their nightgowns—the mother tall, thin, and stately, with her iron-grey hair hanging in wisps from under the rim of her nightcap. She put the candle on the table, and sat bolt upright on the edge of an arm-chair in front of the hearth, and nodded to another opposite her for Kate to sit in. Kate was white to the lips. Her mother was also white; but in the light of the guttering candle her eyes were gleaming balefully under their pent eyebrows. Kate feared them with a child-like, filial terror, and watched her furtively, expectantly.

"Nobody knows how my son met his death but you," said Mrs. Horeton in a low, steady voice. "You told your father it was an accident."

"Yes."

"There was a quarrel."

"Yes."

"Weren't you able to prevent it?"

"When I reached them to interfere, Harry had already fallen."

"You and Harry went out together. How was it that you came to be behind?"

"He saw Mr. Smith on the Table when we were some distance away, and he told me to wait, as he had something to say to him."

"Well?"

"After they had been together a few moments, I saw by Harry's excitement and movements that he was quarrelling; then I saw him raise his hand to strike Mr. Smith, who struck Harry's hand down with his stick; then Harry completely lost control of himself, and rushed at Mr. Smith, who hit him, which caused Harry to stumble and fall off the rock. I just then had reached

the edge of it, but turned and ran round to the face, where I found Harry lying quite still."

"What did Mr. Smith do?"

"He jumped down after Harry, and reached him as soon as I did. When he saw Harry was—was—dead, he said it was an accident."

"The lying hypocrite," muttered Mrs. Horeton, stormily.

"He was dreadfully pained by it," said Kate.

"Naturally, when he had a witness to the blow that killed him."

"It was the fall, not the blow, which did that," said Kate.

"Would he have fallen if the blow had not been struck?" Mrs. Horeton's eyes began to shine almost luridly. "Didn't Mr. Smith know there was a big drop on the face of the rock; couldn't he have avoided hitting my son if he had not wished to kill him; and couldn't he have hit him in such a manner that he would have fallen inwards?"

Kate's heart sank. To her Harry's death was an accident, because she did not think Smith was capable of committing murder; while his misery from the accident was so real that no other possibility had entered her mind. To her inexperience, her mother's conviction, and the bare possibility of what her mother said being perhaps true, impressed her. Mrs. Horeton saw it.

"That man murdered my boy," she said slowly and deliberately; "and you are the only one who saw that he was murdered."

"Mother, mother, it cannot be—Mr. Smith could murder nobody."

Kate's voice sounded as if she were crying for mercy.

"Is that your only reason for thinking he did not?"

"I have no other—he—he is—— Oh! mother, it's impossible," said Kate, brokenly.

"Impossible! Do you know who this man is? Do you know that he is the son of your father's worst enemy? Did you ever hear of the injury done by his father to yours?" Kate was silent. "It was when you were a baby. They had a contract to build a railway; that man's father repudiated his share of the loss when

they failed; there were no written documents, so your father had no proof. In spite of it, your father trusted that man's father. He had agreed with your father in selecting some land, while he worked at contracts to help pay for the land—this land—and when it was all paid for that they should divide equally Then your father saw the opportunity to claim for his share of the debt of Smith which he had paid on their unsuccessful contract. He claimed and by a legal quibble was able to hold the land as security. It led to a bitter quarrel, which ended in Mr. Smith and another man cursing and assaulting your father, and swearing that at some time he would be revenged on your father for keeping the land. Too cowardly to risk his own neck, he has trained his son to it, working hard and getting wealth to help him in his brutal purpose. When he died his son came here, a man with a large income, to work as a badly-paid bank clerk in a bank in which he could have been a director. But it gave him an innocent introduction to the neighbourhood, and he had only to hold his tongue, he thought, with his common name, to hide his identity. How often have you seen him go up Table Hill?"—the shot told—"Harry was our only son, and he found out that it was for him, and for him alone, that we got the land. Now do you understand why Harry met his death?"

"Oh! mother, it's impossible," Kate almost gasped.

"Don't you think it's equally impossible for a noble man to work in a mean position, when his nobility could be of better use in using his wealth in a wider field. Can you understand now?"

Her eyes followed every quiver in Kate's suffering body, as stab after stab struck home. Her surprise that Kate did not understand at once turned to resentment, for she saw that Kate was being convinced in spite of her will to the contrary—and she knew that never in the whole course of her life before had she ever told a half lie to Kate. What she had related was the story her husband had told her, which she knew was not all true. She knew that he had been the swindler, but had condoned it for Harry's sake. Yet through her passion-blinded eyes she firmly believed she saw a whole scheme

of revenge in her son's death at the hands of the son of the man her husband had wronged, and that because she knew Smith, senior, had every reason to feel revengeful

"It is you who are to punish your brother's murderer—nobody else but you, for you are the only one who can."

Kate's beautiful head drooped hopelessly, while the tears came unrestrained from her eyes; but she remained silent.

"He was your own flesh and blood. Your duty, your affection, and your only hope of earthly happiness points to what you must do." Mrs. Horeton watched her narrowly, then started. "For whom are you crying—for your brother—or that—that—murderer?"

There was a low, vindictive gride in her voice. Kate did not answer. Then Mrs. Horeton ceased to press; she threatened.

"Hear me, you! You are to punish that man, no matter what you think, or what you feel. If you halt or hesitate, or he escapes through you, you will be turned out of this house like an abandoned outcast. Now can you understand?"

Mrs. Horeton stood up and walked to the door, with her head turned to watch Kate's agony. Kate did not see the thin, twitching lips, nor the bushy, grey eyebrows drawn down in a terrible scowl of hate, and she did not see that her mother knew now why she hesitated. At the door Mrs. Horeton stopped and waited.

"Did you hear me?" she asked at last.

"Oh! mother, be merciful." Kate looked up, then shrank quivering back into her chair.

"Merciful? Was he merciful when he struck my son from me? And merciful to whom?" She paused. "To a man from whom every law of God and man demands retribution—and asked by you!"

"Give me time, mother," pleaded Kate, beginning to sob heart-brokenly.

Her mother watched her for a moment, her features working, then left, leaving the door open behind her.

. . . . . .

The low sobbing of Kate gradually awakened Nell. She started up, her eyes filling with tears. It was a rare

thing for Kate to cry, and she well knew that it must be some terrible trouble that broke her self-control down so completely. Creeping quietly to the dining-room, she saw Kate kneeling on the floor, with her head in her arms in the arm-chair. With a low sob she ran and knelt beside her, raised her head till it rested on her own breast, then, putting her arms round her, she waited silently for the paroxysm to pass. Nell's presence gradually brought Kate the alleviation of sympathy, and in a little while Nell noiselessly led her to bed, into which they got together. Nell asked what her mother had said; but Kate was unable to tell. She folded her arms tightly round her sister with a clinging affection that only asked silence, and Nell forbore to question further.

Next morning they went about their work—Kate with a very white face and absorbed in deep thought, so that neither of them spoke much. Several times Kate looked at Nell as if about to speak, and yet refrained.

Shortly before breakfast a policeman came with a subpoena for Kate to attend the inquest on Tuesday morning. Mrs. Horeton saw him coming, and opened her door to listen as he handed the paper to Nell, kept it open till she heard Nell call Kate and give her the paper, then shut her door with a snap.

When she read the blue paper Kate became more absorbed still. After a little time she brightened somewhat, and began to talk by asking Nell if she had heard any rumours about Mr. Smith.

"Something," answered Nell. "I haven't heard it said directly, but—but there seems a kind of suspicion that Harry did not die by accident."

Kate looked frightened. She thought the suspicion was only her mother's.

"Do you know why people think it wasn't an accident?"

"I can only guess, of course. You know Smith is engaged to Mary, and that Harry regarded himself as engaged to her in an unannounced way—well, they think Smith got jealous."

"Do you think it can be true?" asked Kate, a little eagerly.

"I don't think so, though Jack and father both have

the suspicion."

Nell began to think.

"Did you ever hear that Mr. Smith's father was in some way connected in business with our's?"

"No!" said Nell, surprisedly; "Was he?"

"Yes, a sort of contracting partnership 20 years ago. Don't you remember how on that tennis day father and mother did not seem to like Smith?"

"Yes, and how uncomfortable they looked at the tea table when Harry talked about getting him here—and were going to refuse. I wonder what the mystery is?" Kate repeated what her mother told her. Nell looked very thoughtful.

"Half mother's yarn is a lie; for that as a reason for killing Harry is sheer rubbish. Smith could never be such a fool."

"But what about Mary Warren?"

"Why should he want to do it even then; he is engaged to her, so Harry didn't count?"

"Harry might have told him the story about Dick Welstrom."

"But Harry was willing to marry her himself, in spite of it, so that wouldn't count."

"I wish Mary had married Dick," said Kate, with sudden vehemence.

"So she would if he hadn't been so fond of beer, and his father cut him off."

"Mrs. Warren never knew," said Kate, sardonically. "I wonder if Harry did tell Mr. Smith?"

"That we shall never know; but if he did, it would have been ample justification for giving Harry a hiding."

"Do you think you could marry a man suspected of murder, Nell?"

Nell looked startled, then flushed a rosy red.

"I suppose you mean do I think I could marry Mr. Smith, in spite of rumours and suspicions? Frankly, I think I could—if I loved him."

"I suppose if you loved him you'd scout all rumours and suspicions."

"I think so," said Nell, looking curiously at Kate, who became silent again, and remained so until they had finished their breakfast.

Nell had been thinking to some purpose. Kate saw the conclusion. When they were washing up, Kate resumed the conversation.

"I suppose you know what we are in for when mother gets over the first shock of her grief?"

Nell looked troubled.

"Yes," she said; "it was bad enough before."

"It may be all right for you, Nell, but mother will have a special grudge against me if Mr. Smith escapes punishment."

"Is that what she wanted you about last night?"

Kate simply nodded. Nell looked serious, as well as troubled.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I don't know yet; I'm trying to think. It's clear I'll have to go if he does get off. Mother is perfectly convinced that he ought not to."

"Are you?"

Kate pulled herself together to answer calmly—

"I really don't know; he might have been as cunning as mother says. If I really thought so, I could easily give my evidence to make it appear without a doubt."

Nell's eyes blazed a little.

"You seem pretty cold-blooded," she said.

"Have you no doubt, Nell?"

"None whatever—now."

Kate looked quietly at Nell for a moment; then made up her mind. She had also been thinking to some purpose. She saw that Nell was superior to appearances, and would do exactly what her heart dictated. Such evidence may not be legally valid; but it is supremely useful in gaining earthly happiness—if the head above the heart is a sound one. Kate had very little doubt herself, but she hated Mary Warren. It was the touch of jealousy that upset the finer balance of her judgment. Unlike Nell, she was not content with her own feeling, and to wait for time to justify it. She saw that Nell was perfectly free from any jealousy, and did not suspect her of any affection for Smith. She determined there and then that Nell never would. She loved Nell deeply—never so much as now, when she silently resolved to give up her love on her sister's account, and inwardly de-

cermined that if her sister never married Jim Smith, Mary Warren never would. Then, putting on her hat, she went for a long, lonely walk into the hills, to take a long farewell look at the home where, in spite of tyranny, ignorance, and the stupidity of her mother's insane love for Harry, she had felt a little pleasure for a few weeks before the final tragedy had come, to scatter her every earthly hope of womanly happiness. She felt the strength of her woman's passion, and knew that, no matter what might happen in the future, she would never think or dream of any man, as long as she lived, as she had thought and dreamt of James Smith.

Then she proceeded to tangle herself more completely in her scheme for the attainment of freedom. This time she used the most dangerous instrument invented by men, and took up her pen. Writing a short note, and putting on her hat, she told Nell not to expect her back for tea.

"Allow Me to Introduce My Nephew," said Miss Anstey.

## CHAPTER XX.

Jim found there was a great deal more comfort in his room than in wandering round even the hotel. He never imagined there was so much affection for a family possible to outsiders. That is what he thought the silent hostility of Boorana for himself meant. He was wretched for having taken Harry's life in such a stupid, sordid quarrel, and though knowing he was hardly to blame, admitted to himself that he ought have been more careful in hitting Harry back. He was also a little frightened. The only witness to the fight was the dead man's sister; and upon how much her prejudices might influence her version of it depended really whether he was to be completely exonerated from all blame, or be committed for manslaughter—perhaps for a more serious charge. He was hopefully influenced in his opinion of Kate more by his imagination than his experience, and, therefore, gave her every quality of perfection his fancy could suggest. He who had thought himself a cynic and man of the world, who had seen unstirred the finest looking women in Europe's principal capitals, had returned to Australia full of unspecified and dreamy ambitions, to find everyone of them nugatory unless he could earn the approbation of a simple, partly educated, though beautiful woman, in an obscure Australian township. He inwardly laughed at himself, but rather mirthlessly. It was not mere idleness that had made the mischief, as at Boorana he had idled less than anywhere. Yet he was philosopher enough to know the feeling was no accident, man enough to try not to sneer at it, and human enough to resent being at the mercy of some fate which he could neither understand, nor now control.

Some of the possible results scared him, even made him wish that he had been trained to pin long names to little insects. He had seen the insects could be of an absorbing life interest, and thought it would be preferable to

making a fool of himself over a woman. When he began logically to reason out that there was something better in the world than the most perfect love between a man and a woman, he got clean out of his depth, and floundered, metaphorically, into Kate's arms. He admitted his logic might be correct—and began to think of Kate again.

After the inquest he would stay no longer in Boorana. Before he could again think of renewing his friendship with Catherine Horeton—his heart throbbed at her name—he would stay away at least six months, perhaps longer.

A letter to Mr. Evans, the general manager of the Merchants' Bank, contained his resignation, for which he offered no explanation. He knew Evans would supply that, and express it in a smile. But he could not bring himself to post the letter. Then Jim wrote Evans another letter without his resignation, explaining what had happened, and requesting him to say nothing to his aunt about it in case he met her. He knew his aunt never read anything about tragedies except head-lines, and there had only been a short paragraph in the country news about Harry's death.

Jim had arranged with the local correspondent to keep out his name, so it merely appeared as an accident, due to a fall while quarrelling with another young man.

Jim was sitting in his room brooding on his failure, after all, to do something useful; he even laughed as he thought how seriously he had taken his own crude ideas on social reform and the unequal distribution of wealth. Harry's death indicated to him more clearly than anything he had thought the futility of wealth, and he saw that time more than any conscious effort of an individual would bring its own solution.

Something useful! And he was the immediate cause of depriving a family of the main object of all its effort. He left the window to pace the room, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door.

"Come in." The chamber-maid handed him a note—

"Will you come down and see me?—C. Horeton." It was scrawled in a shaky hand.

"What on earth—— Say yes," he said, looking up at the chamber-maid.

Jim put on his hat. When he got outside, he saw a woman standing by the horse trough, dusty from a long walk on a dry road. She bowed. He advanced with a look of puzzled interrogation on his face. She had expected to see fear there. He could not see her face through the veil, nor did she greet him with the customary formalities.

"I wish to have a private talk with you," she said. "It would be better if we were walking."

He noted that her voice was strained, as if she spoke with a great effort, and he noted at the same time that it had become curiously like her mother's. As they passed into one of the cross streets, a man passed, who stared rudely at Jim, and recognised Kate. He paused wonderingly. Jim saw him join a little knot on the corner, and noted that the buzz of their talk ceased. He began to feel nervous, and was about to speak, when a train rumbled along the line and made him compulsorily silent. The train stopped, hissing at the station. It was queer how all the little common-place things he used scarcely to notice took on a semblance of importance now. He could not explain it, but they seemed like straws to a drowning man; then he knew he was frightened. In the distance was Table Hill. They both glanced at it, and by a common impulse turned to each other.

"It is in connection with that"—she nodded towards the hill—"that I want to see you."

"Yes," said Jim, with polite interrogation, and felt the nervous strain ease a little with her break into speech. "I suppose she wants some information about why Harry and I quarrelled," he thought. But he was surprised at her next remark.

"Perhaps you do not know that the death of my brother will make a vast difference in the position of my sister and me."

"Of course, I can guess as much. Besides, he was your only brother, and a great favourite." He thought she was alluding to their becoming heiresses.

"I did not mean that way," she said. Jim politely waited. "He was my mother's idol." Jim still waited.

"She was harsh to us before—she will be infinitely worse now."

Jim was beginning to feel uncomfortable again. His surmise was evidently wrong.

"I am telling you this for a definite purpose, which I shall come to presently."

Jim was beginning to feel bewildered. He tried to bring her to the point at once.

"Perhaps you do not know that your brother and I had quarrelled before."

"Yes, I do; the stockman told me."

"Did he say what it was about?"

"Yes; he said you were asked to desist from smoking in the paddocks for fear of the grass firing."

"That is probably what your brother told the stockman. The real reason was entirely different."

Kate's heart contracted painfully; her purpose became more fixed. It was her turn to pause.

"Your brother demanded that I should desist from doing what I had every right to do; but more than that, he lied about it. I need not tell you that it involves the name of a woman."

Jim stopped. Kate's purpose became quite fixed. He had removed from her mind the last vestige of doubt that he was engaged to Mary Warren. She remembered now Mary's kiss, and her bright glance towards him on the night of the dance. She felt a fleeting desire to ask him if he were engaged to Mary. It was not for years after that she tried to explain her fatal hesitation, when she had suffered its bitter consequences. Then she knew it was the result of the inherited system of female education, which had automatically taught her innumerable platitudes, such as "maidenly reserve and modesty," which were openly taught to heighten sexual attraction by a disguising elusiveness. In her present simplicity she misunderstood their real purpose, for she was not given to analysis, and knew almost nothing of the conventions; so she believed in platitudes implicity. Jim knew what they meant, and if he had only known Kate entertained a spark of affection for him, he would have understood her reserve; but her very simplicity misled him as much as it had misled her.

"I know the name of the woman, but I have come to tell you what my mother told me last night," said Kate.

"In what way can that concern me?" asked Jim.

She thought he was becoming evasive.

"Very intimately," she persisted, rather dryly. "The loss of her son has made her peculiarly penetrating, or astonishingly blind—I shall know shortly perhaps. Anyway, I wish to find out." She hesitated. Then, looking directly at Jim, she said quickly—"My mother demands that I shall punish her son's murderer."

"His murderer," gasped Jim. "Good God, woman, what do you mean?" Kate mistook the horror in his tone for detected guilt. "You saw it all from beginning to end—surely you can't think that?"

He gazed at her with the expression of a man who thought he had been playing with an angel, to suddenly discover it turn to a snake.

"Yes," she said, trembling; "I saw it all. But I did not know then you had an inherited grudge against us."

Jim remembered in a flash the queer glances of old Harrison when questioning him during his first week in the bank. He began to feel the arms of some invisible octopus were gripping him relentlessly. Kate continued—

"But I do know that to get up a quarrel on such a place as the Table rock was the very situation to give a crime the appearance of an accident. My mother also indicated that if you had struck Harry differently, he would have fallen differently—not off the rock; the choice lay with you."

"Do you think your brother thought of the possible consequences of knocking me off the rock?"

Kate looked puzzled; but she was not there to argue.

"He was a smaller man than you, with less need to think of that possibility."

"But it was perfectly plain to you that I never sought the quarrel."

"I wish it were," said Kate, passionately, though quietly. She checked herself, and went on again—

"My mother then insisted that it depended on my evidence to-morrow whether you went away a free man —or not."

Jim moved one pace away from her involuntarily. She saw the movement and the expression, and all the woman in her revolted. But her intention had got hold of her will, and she proceeded pitilessly, in spite of herself. It was the same feeling as a girl she had known when trying to get a frightened horse over too high a jump. She would do it, though it might break the horse's and her own neck.

"My mother has never failed yet to keep her word. If I say anything that will save you in my evidence, she will turn me out of her house an abandoned outcast, and brazen forth that I was a woman who had abetted the murder of her brother. I shall lose an unhappy home—still, a home—if I clear you. I do not know really whether you killed my brother by accident or not, but I think the price to pay for your life is cheap, in asking you to provide another home for my sister and me."

Jim gave way to a touch of cynicism, the refuge of astonished incredulity.

"Perhaps to provide for you alone would be sufficient. I don't know about its cheapness to an abandoned outcast."

It was a foolish remark. He did not mean it seriously; cynicism is never serious; he knew its foolishness by the way Kate's mouth shut into a thin line. She was deadly serious. Inexperience always is.

"I accept the term outcast, but it is to save me from the possibility of being an abandoned one that I am bargaining," said Kate. "You shall take us both away; but shall marry Nell. She at least believes in your innocence."

Jim looked at Kate with a puckered forehead. The woman was evidently sane. It was not ordinary blackmail she was demanding; yet she was asking practically for his life—and not for herself. All the sentiment he had felt for her left him without a struggle. She was become simply a person with whom he was holding business relations of a most unusual nature, and who had the whip hand in driving the bargain. How on earth he had imagined her to be a simple-minded country maiden was now as incomprehensible to him as her real motive,

for he saw there was something behind her demand he could not fathom.

There were so many lines of action which Kate might have taken that the one she took was probably unknown to herself in all its causation. One thing stood out clearly, which was an instinctive inability, essentially feminine, to go straight to an end from the beginning; but after many evolutions, like the winding of a hawk before it strikes, when she struck she struck home. Her tortuous beginning was her ignorance—striking home was her simplicity. But they both writhed in the mutual grip.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"Your proposition wants thinking over," said Jim in a shaking voice. "If you wait here, I shall return in as few moments as I can, and give you an answer." And with a frown very like a scowl he left her.

Kate staggered, rather than walked, to the fence for support. Her trembling communicated itself to the wires, which hummed softly. Before her was a recently ring-barked paddock. Every tree was leafless and naked. To her swimming head they seemed to be waving in the last writhings of death. Her ears were singing, which sounded like the low, sustained wail of agony to her from the trees, which tossed and quivered in wild sympathy with the woman, who felt like dying beside them. "What have I done; what have I done," went through her brain in jangling reiteration. She was answered by the wild shriek of some quarrelling magpies, followed by the cynical laugh of a jackass. It was taken up by another; then followed by a flock. It shrieked and roared with mad laughter, which gradually softened down to a low chuckle, which was saying, "Look at her. Look at her," then broke with a sudden burst into reckless hilarity. Beyond the paddock was a thick green band of vegetation hiding the bed of the creek, and against which the gaunt, bare gums shone white and luminous in the twilight. Suddenly the trees and ground ceased swaying; the magpies and jackasses became birds going to their evening rest.

It was the cheery "Gee-up!" of a human voice that brought her back to the reality of things. A flock of stone plover wailed from the creek, beginning with a long, low, heart-broken whistle, rising in a rapidly increasing crescendo to the expression of a world of sorrow. And Kate found herself sobbing in silent sympathy with them. She and they alone understood the age-long life of sorrow and loneliness in the bush. Her bosom was heaving in the effort to restrain her sobs from breaking

through restraint into articulate cries; for the human voice was coming nearer, now gaily humming. Beneath it she detected the soft creep, creep of bullock hoofs in the dust, and the groan and whine of a heavily-laden waggon. Then the voice broke into song. It was an old lullaby she had often heard her mother sing to Harry when a baby. Leaning her head on the rail, she wept silently, for she also had lost something as precious to herself as Harry to his mother. Kate suffered the lowest depth of humiliation. If somebody had said to her, "You have lost your self-respect," she would have understood her feeling instantly. It came from Jim's hard and contemptuous tone when he left her.

Strong emotion leads to an inevitable reaction. Many it leaves stupidly unresponsive. It left Kate full of resentment, which grew swiftly. If he did not consider her worth a second thought, she had no need to consider either him or herself any further, which made her instantly reckless of every other purpose but the attainment of her end.

The bullock driver ceased singing in the middle of a line, and stared at her curiously. He saw a graceful and erect figure leaning against the fence, the face defiant, beautiful, but inexpressibly sad. He passed in silent pity, wondering.

Jim strode away, his pace unconsciously erratic, in tune with his feelings, his heart beating tumultuously; suffering fear, anger, disappointment, and love, but principally fear. Torn between the opposite inclinations to laugh and swear, they ended in a curse, as he nearly impaled himself on the horns of the bullock team. He tried to look at her proposition independently of herself, but could only see her coldly scrutinising eyes looking directly into his. Was she devil or saint, herself or not herself? It utterly confounded him. He had always suffered a hidden dread that he might become the victim of some matrimonial adventuress. But if ever a woman appeared indifferent, both through her circumstances and her character, to money, it was Kate Horeton. And she was trying to compel him to marry her sister—because he had enough money to support them both.

Turning, he walked slowly back, and saw her still

leaning over the fence, her beautiful figure full of unconscious grace. With a pang in his heart, he turned and strode away once more, wondering why such a splendid body should hold the soul of a—a—— He could not bring himself, even now, to apply an ugly word to her. Then it struck him these emotions were entirely beside the question. He must think, and think hard, of some plan that would take him out of his unusual scrape. He had not taken it quite seriously yet.

How much did she believe of her statement that he had killed her brother intentionally, and why didn't her sister believe it? That was her sister's affair, she had said. If Kate believed he was a murderer, it was a devilish scheme; if she didn't believe it, it was still a devilish scheme. She was pure devil all through. Yet he remembered she seemed to take an interest in him that was not unkind, and when she had spoken to him in their casual meetings before the night of the ball, he had noticed that her voice had often taken on a softer inflexion than when talking to others. It was that which had attracted him, as much as her beautiful face and s— he was nearly saying the word simplicity. Then it struck him that his own wish to see what was pleasing to himself might have had more to do with her apparent interest in him than any other fact, and what he took to himself specially she might give to others, who would take it entirely as a matter of course. If she had taken any particular interest in him apart from mere curiosity, she would have managed to find out how often he had strolled to Table Hill—(she had)—and managed to meet him. Now would she? And he knew that if she had, he would have ceased visiting Table Hill at the first suspicion. Then he concluded he would never make up his mind definitely about her motives, except that if she had been guided by a purely sordid one, something in her conduct would have indicated it. It was for her sister Nell she planned the marriage. He had often noticed their undemonstrative affection for each other. Again he was puzzled. Then there was this talk of a quarrel between her father and his. He stopped and pushed his fingers through his hair. A gleam of what looked like enlightenment flitted through his mind; there was some-

thing behind that which might explain the whole business. He tried to remember if his father had told him anything about a Mr. Horeton, but could remember nothing; then the hint the old man, Harrison, had half given him, the unpleasant way Mrs. Horeton looked at him on tennis day, the seeking of a quarrel by Harry—and now Kate's scheme.

He determined to write to his aunt, and to put Kate off till he could get a reply. The inquest was to be on the following morning. He could not get a reply till the day after; then the inquest would show whether Kate was really serious or not. With this determination, he returned to her. She did not hear him coming, and was startled when he spoke. She glanced at him under her eyelids, and saw that his face was set—and suspicious.

"I cannot seriously believe you think I have killed your brother intentionally, Miss Horeton, and before I can give you a final answer to your demand, I shall have to communicate with my solicitor. Anyway, I do not think your evidence is sufficient to make your threat good, for you see your evidence will be regarded as of a prejudiced nature."

"That depends upon whether I can give it without prejudice—I think I can."

She saw he was fighting to gain time. Not knowing what a solicitor was exactly, she did not fear one, and she saw he was trying to meet her with a counter scheme. It gave her a kind of contempt for him. In a way it seemed to indefinably compensate her sense of loss.

"And I cannot think you would like your brother's murderer to marry your sister."

"Nor would I; but she believes in your innocence, which is entirely her affair, not mine."

Jim was staggered; he thought Kate at least cared for her sister.

"That's pretty cold-blooded; does she know of your and your mother's belief?"

"My mother's conviction, but my suspicion, please; she knows."

"Does she know of this little plan of yours?"

"No."

"And if I should tell her of it?"

"She would say you were lying, and it would settle any attempt to save you by me."

"How am I to know that your sister will fall in with your scheme?"

"You have only to ask her to marry you."

"And if she refused me?"

"She won't refuse."

Jim gave up trying to understand her. There was nothing more to do but wait the result of the inquest.

"I shall give you my answer to-morrow night."

Kate understood.

"Good night," she said, formally.

If he had been a little less in love, or a little more, he might have saved himself and her from being a pair of arrant fools. Poor Jim was rather proud of the way he was managing his own affairs.

## CHAPTER XXII.

The morning came calm and clear after the shower in the night, which laid the dust, washed the vegetation clean, and freshened the air, till everybody felt exhilarated, and too good-natured not to feel sorry there was to be such a melancholy function as an inquest. Early in the morning Horeton had made the hands clean up the wool-shed. It was not a very big one, but quite large enough for the purpose; and he thought it better to hold it as near the home as possible, as it would save wasting half a day, and keep the men from the hotels. Even the sadness of the occasion was not sufficient to break through twenty years of business foresight. He looked worried and care-worn; but not more than was expected.

It was eleven o'clock when the coroner drove in. With him were two Justices of the Peace, who seemed weighed down with the importance of their office. The coroner looked a little bored. The various knots of people stopped talking about stock, and those who had remained sitting in their buggies got out and hitched their horses to the fence. There was no excitement. The whole thing was looked upon as a kind of outing, and as a necessary formality some way connected with government. The shock of Harry's death and the effect of Mrs. Horeton's heart-broken words had worn off.

When Jim appeared he was greeted with the customary indifferent nods. If anything, the people were rather friendly in their indifference. For all that, the strange and contradictory rumours of Harry's death not being an accident persisted. There is always someone who talks of Machiavellian tactics in the most innocent affairs; but in this the Machiavellis were numerous enough to create a larger crowd than usual.

At five minutes past eleven Mr. and Mrs. Horeton and Kate were seen coming towards the shed. The coroner took his seat; the jury was sworn when the Horetons came in. Mrs. Horeton glanced fiercely round the shed,

all traces of the bereaved mother gone. Behind her was Kate, her face still as a mask. There was not a tremor in her eyelids as she glanced slowly at Smith, who stood in the back of the court. She looked at the coroner, as if trying to read his character, and felt mildly surprised to see him looking bored. He looked up and caught her glance; the bored expression melted away like mist from a freshly lighted lamp chimney. Kate's beauty was unexpected, and he saw she was the daughter of the grim-looking woman beside her. The proceedings opened with the formal evidence of the policeman and those who had carried Harry home. Then the doctor was called. He said the deceased had died almost painlessly and instantaneously from dislocation of the third cervical verterbra; the injury could not have been self-inflicted, but was the result of falling backwards on to the ground from a height, or on to a stone from his own height. There was a bruise on his chest, another slight one on the right cheek made by an open hand. The next witness was Jack, the stockman. He told how Miss Kate had come for him, and how he had brought Mr. Horeton. He said the height of the fall was ten feet, about. He did not see the accident, but he had seen Miss Horeton walking with her brother towards Table Hill, and, as far as he knew, she had been with him the whole time. Kate was called next; expectation ran high; she walked to the table and waited. Jim felt a burning pain under his eyes, and his mouth go very dry. He braced himself together, and scarcely listened to the formal part of her evidence; then his ears caught and held her words.

"—we were talking about our own affairs, when my brother caught sight of Mr. Smith standing on the Table rock. He said to me that he wanted to speak to him, and told me to wait where I was. I stood and watched them meet, and, as they talked, I saw them getting a little excited, for their gestures were more rapid, and now and then I could hear their voices, though not what they were saying. I expected they would quarrel more seriously, for my brother was very passionate. I began to walk towards them. I was about 50 yards away when I saw Mr. Smith strike my

brother's hand down with his cane. My brother had raised his hand to strike Mr. Smith; then he rushed at Mr. Smith, who dropped his cane and struck my brother on the chest, who staggered back, but recovered and ran at Mr. Smith again. Then Mr. Smith hit him on the face, when Harry stumbled sideways and disappeared. By this time I was only a few feet from the edge of the rock, and saw Mr. Smith jump down after my brother, while I ran round to the face of the rock. I think then my brother was already dead, as he made no sound, no did he breathe after I reached him."

"Did Mr. Smith make any remark to you?"

"As soon as he saw me he said, 'Good God, Miss Horeton, this is a terrible accident.'"

"What did you reply?"

"Nothing."

"Had your brother and Mr. Smith ever quarrelled before?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what about?"

"Not definitely."

"What does that mean?"

"Only what I heard from report."

"Did he ever tell you anything to lead you to believe he did not like Mr. Smith?"

"Yes."

"What did he tell you?"

"That Mr. Smith was a hypocritical scamp."

"When did he tell you this? Was it on the day of his death?"

"Yes."

"Over what did he call him hypocritical?"

"Some ideas of Mr. Smith's in connection with land ownership."

"Why did he mention it to you rather than any other member of the family?"

"He said it, or something which meant it, before the whole family once."

"What made him say it to you on the day of his death?"

"We happened to be talking about Mr. Smith."

"Were you friendly with your brother?"

"Yes."

"Had you always been friendly with him?"

"Never unfriendly."

"Do you mean that you were more friendly with him of late than you once had been?"

"Yes."

"For how long have you been friendly of late?"

"Only a few months."

"How long has Mr. Smith been in the district?"

Kate's face flushed a rosy red, and she hesitated. The coroner was apparently looking at his notes, but Kate saw he was watching her keenly; she got redder, but was silent.

"You may stand down for a moment," said the coroner.

"Mr. Smith," called the policeman.

"How long have you been in the district?"

"Nearly three months."

"Did you ever know Mr. Henry Horeton before?"

"No."

"Nor any of the family?"

"No."

The justices looked surprised, also some of the jury. A justice said something in a low voice to the coroner, who replied, "That's immaterial." Then turned to Jim again.

"You are a clerk employed in the Merchants' Bank?"

"Yes."

"Are you the son of Mr. James Smith, who died some few months ago?"

"Yes."

"Were you disinherited by him?"

"I refuse to answer any question connected with my purely private affairs."

The coroner bit his lip.

"Did you often walk out to Table Hill?"

"Yes."

"What was your object?"

"Exercise mainly."

"Mainly; had you any other object?"

Jim flushed a little.

"And the view; it is very fine."

"Did you ever quarrel with the deceased before?"

"Yes."

"How long ago was it?"

"Four days before my last."

"How did that quarrel end?"

"The stockman came and interfered."

"How did it begin?"

"He came and ordered me off the place for smoking."

"Was there no other reason?"

Jim hesitated.

"It involves a woman's name."

"You need mention no names, but it is important that I should know."

"He forbade me in an insolent manner to visit a friend's house."

"Did you refuse?"

"I denied his right to the request, and resented his manner."

"Was your second quarrel for the same reason?"

"The reason in both quarrels was his insolent manner to me."

"When the deceased struck you, you were quite aware of the danger of a fall."

"I did not think of it in defending myself, but I knew of it."

The stockman was called again. He told of how temperate Jim was in the first quarrel. Then described how he had often to sit on Harry's stomach when Harry lost his self-control. Mrs. Horeton listened with angry incredulity; some of the people laughed. Kate was recalled.

"You say that you and your brother have been more friendly than you used to be only for the last few months. Was there any particular reason for it?"

Kate looked confused. She could not tell the reason to him with her mother and all those strangers listening, and she saw the coroner's keen eyes watching her again. Then somebody handed a note to him, which he passed to the jury, and his face went blank.

"None," Kate answered.

"Had you any reason to believe your brother was engaged?"

"I knew he was not."

"How did you know it?"

"He told me he was not."

"Then you knew all the time why your brother was quarrelling with Mr. Smith. You were also seen in the township yesterday in the company of Mr. Smith. What was the object of your visit to him?"

"It had nothing to do with this case."

Kate threw a quick glance towards her mother, and saw surprised horror in her face.

"You admit that you called on Mr. Smith?"

"Yes," she answered, a little defiantly.

"You may stand down," said the coroner. Then he spoke to the jury—

"There has evidently been some collusion between Miss Horeton and Mr. Smith; its real nature or extent there is no evidence to show, but that it has some bearing on the death of the deceased is plain. Since the arrival of Mr. Smith in the district, she became friendly with her brother; she also became friendly with Mr. Smith. It was Mr. Smith who killed her brother, whether by accident or design will not be made clear till the nature of the collusion between Miss Horeton, who was the only witness to her brother's death, and Mr. Smith is known. Their collusion may be criminal or perfectly innocent, but that will have to be decided in a higher court; therefore, I direct that a verdict of manslaughter be given against Mr. Smith."

The jury conversed a moment amongst themselves, while the coroner spoke to the justices.

Without rising from their seats, the jury brought in the verdict as directed, and the coroner wrote out the warrant for Jim's arrest.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

There was a dead silence in the shed, followed by a low murmur of surprise; for, after all, nobody seriously believed Smith had deliberately killed Harry, except two, who shook their heads knowingly; but everyone was too astonished to notice them. Filing out of the building, they gathered into knots, and began eagerly talking. When Jim came out they stared at him closely, but saw nothing to lead them to believe he was frightened. The physiognomists began to study his face—not by the lines which indicated generosity, but by the bumps that showed his criminality. He was square-jawed and short-haired; both were characteristics of the criminal—particularly the short hair, which could not have been the barber, as they went to him themselves. There were others who merely felt a kind of pity, which elevated them in their own opinion, and there are few who can resist that form of self-flattery. Among them was Mr. Grant, but in him it was mixed with a genuine regret. Jim had been uniformly kind to his children, had never resented anything he had been told to do, had been eager to learn his business, and a willing worker; and the very last thing he would have suspected in him was a tendency to crime. Jim was not in the mood for sympathy or pity, and Mr. Grant had enough sense—it required but little—to offer him neither.

When Kate left the shed she was leaning on her father's arm, hopelessly puzzled. It was not what she had said that had fulfilled her threat to Jim, but what she had done.

That her visit to him the day before would influence the verdict had never remotely entered her mind; she had never thought of being recognised, and had been perfectly certain of having full control of the situation. She knew the certainty rose from her mother's, but had never had any reason to doubt her mother before. Her

scheme was beginning to move out of her control, and she was frightened.

What others might think of her conduct in visiting Jim had not troubled her, nor did she notice the furtive winks and sly smiles that followed her, and would not have understood them if she had. All she wanted was to be alone and think of the coming trial. Would it rake out of her the real motives of her new friendship with Harry, all the little details of her influence over him, and its real purpose—the capture of Mr. Smith in a matrimonial noose in the interests of her and her sister's freedom? That was, perhaps, innocent enough. But how about her threat to Mr. Smith of committing perjury unless he married her sister? Whichever way she gave her evidence, it would be perjury to one side—if not the other now. She looked at her mother leaning on the other arm of her father, and saw she was puzzled, too, yet elated. She was puzzled because the means to the end were a little beyond her understanding, but elated with the end so far. It was a guarantee of the final end.

Mr. Horeton was looking straight in front of him, with a quaking heart and steady eyes; he was thinking of the coming trial, too, when every tittle of evidence would be raked out of everybody who might throw light on Smith's motive in coming to Boorana, which would necessitate an explanation of the nature of the original connection between Smith's father and himself, and the whole sordid swindle he had legally accomplished would be revealed. He felt rather than saw his wife's elation, knowing that to her Smith's commitment was only the act of a just and beneficent God, working through her hands and the officers of the law; for he knew, without knowing how, that she had been influencing Kate. He had not interfered, as usual. Should he? Then dare he? He had had a large experience of life. Unlike his wife and daughter, knew the danger of trying to alter the natural currents of human action, more especially in trying to move them in his own favour directly. It had always been his policy to wait till some fool or the other came along, and get him to do it—like Smith and Johnston—but even now he shuddered at the memory of the curses Johnston had hurled at him, and he only

found out *they* were fools after the event. Could he then interfere now to the extent of stopping the interference of his wife? He would have to explain things which he did not want to explain, even to her. He determined to wait.

The three of them had got automatically into the habit of concealing their feelings, and except for what seemed a little natural worry their faces expressed nothing to the small crowd at the inquest; but inwardly two of them were consumed with anxiety, and all of them were beginning to forget their grief in the new troubles and interests which had arisen from Harry's death. Reaching the house, they went to their respective rooms, which indicated the real divergence of their interests; but, like everything else concerning the Horetons, it was not to be seen by outsiders.

A few minutes afterwards all the silent, yet fussy, preparations were going on for Harry's burial. The girls stayed in their room; Mrs. Horeton was in her's. She had taken her last long look at him in the morning before she went to the inquest. Mr. Horeton sat in the dining-room waiting for the preparations to be completed, still thinking of the coming trial, looking at all its possibilities for some hope of comfort, and seeing none, hoping something might turn up to save him; yet nothing could take away the land, for it was as firmly his as if he had got it in perfect honesty, and would go down undisputed to—— He was going to say to his son. The pleasure of his land turned to dust and ashes in his mouth; while the loss of Harry came home to his heart for the first time in all its bearings, and nearly broke it. That was to come later.

Then he heard the stamping of horses' feet, the clatter and rattle of buggy wheels, and the murmur of human voices mixed with the barking of dogs. He knew it was the arrival of the people who would follow Harry to his grave, and pulled himself together when a knock came to the door.

Everything was ready. The coffin was in the hearse, his own buggy waiting for him behind it, with Jack in the driver's seat. He got in, and the procession started. Buggy after buggy, some clean and spruce, the majority

ramshackle, with years old mud clinging to them, came gradually into line, which ended in a long train of about 200 horsemen, mounted on anything from plough horses to racers. Mrs. Horeton watched it through a slit in her window blind until it disappeared in the distant timber; then she turned away and sat in an arm-chair, immovably staring at the empty hearth.

Kate and Nell stood silently watching the disappearing funeral, too; when it was out of sight, they went in and mechanically took up the work where it had been left off for Kate to attend the inquest. It was not indifference, only the force of habit. They were still busy when their father returned. They gave him something to eat, which he ate silently; then went into his wife, with whom he stayed five minutes. When he came out it was to go straight to the stable and mount his horse, to try by taking up the burden of his business life to lighten his burden of fear and dread. In another hour Mrs. Horeton came out of her room, and, taking up a broom, she swept and cleaned Harry's room; then took her knitting out on the verandah. She, too, was unable to sit in idle grief. It was then Nell asked Kate the result of the inquest.

"Mr. Smith was committed to take his trial for manslaughter."

"Does that mean that they do not think Harry's death was an accident?"

"It means that there is some doubt." Kate was dreading that Nell would ask more.

Nell put down a dish she was wiping, and leant thoughtfully against the dresser. Kate went on with her work; at last Nell took up the dish, and, wiping it dry, remarked—

"Most men seem dreadful fools," and went quietly on with her work.

Kate knew she meant the coroner and jury. Jack came in and sat down to his tea. He was the only man on the station who had his meals in the kitchen of the homestead. He watched Kate furtively as he ate.

"Have you heard anything?" she asked, not looking at him.

"Mr. Smith was arrested as soon as he reached his

hotel; he is going up to gaol by to-night's train."

"They might just as well have saved themselves the trouble," said Nell.

"Don't you think he did it purposely?" he asked.

"Of course I don't."

Jack looked at Kate doubtfully a moment.

"Don't you, Miss Kate?"

"I—I—I don't know," she answered.

Mrs. Horeton came in to say Mary Warren and her mother were coming, but they were to say she would see nobody. Kate told Nell to say she was unwell. Mrs. Warren did not stay long. When Nell came to Kate, she saw Nell had something hard to say.

"What did you go and see Mr. Smith yesterday afternoon for?"

"I had something important to ask him."

"Had it anything to do with the inquest?"

"What has Mary been saying, Nell?"

A counter question always put Nell off the main track.

"She says you have done your best to get Mr. Smith into gaol"—Kate's eyes blazed—"but she says that in his trial she will have something important to say that will get him off, in spite of you."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Kate.

"She says there was some impression from your evidence that she was engaged to Mr. Smith. She says it was a mistake; she is not engaged to him."

"But Mr. Smith——"

"Did he say he was engaged to her?"

"Not in so many words; but there was not much doubt about it."

"Did he actually say he was?" persisted Nell.

"No; but I think there was no doubt," said Kate, beginning to look doubtful. Then the doubt struck her overwhelmingly; she felt as near fainting as a perfectly healthy woman could. Nell saw something like terror in her face; she went and put her arms round her.

"Never mind, Kate; Mary always was a cat. I don't care what you wanted to see Mr. Smith about. But I think it was terribly foolish of you."

Kate began to think so, too.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

It took Jim Smith some hours to recover from his commitment, and a few more to recover from the shock of his arrest. It was only when inside the walls of the gaol that he thought of applying for bail. He telegraphed to two friends in Melbourne—he was fortunate in his father's friends. When the messages reached them they thought there was some mistake, but made an immediate application, and in two days Jim was released on two bonds of £5,00 each. It was the amount which revealed to him that he was in a really serious predicament.

His two friends met him as he was leaving the gaol, and wanted an explanation. Jim related the facts of his quarrel, merely mentioning Kate as the principal witness. They were experienced men of the world, and saw there was some reservation with regard to that witness; but used their experience in leaving him unquestioned, and in recommending a clever, though unknown, young lawyer for his defence in the coming trial, which was to take place in three weeks..

Then they returned to Melbourne, where Jim's other friends were much exercised in curiosity, and in trying to explain his sudden flight. When they heard the guarded explanations of the two bondsmen, the ladies, as usual, smiled knowingly, and said things which meant "cherchez la femme." They even used the French phrase, for it sounded ever so much more knowing, simply because it was French. The men thought the same, but said nothing, and all were agreed in thinking him too much of a fool to be a criminal, even thinking him a fool for his fantastic socialistic ideas. To them socialism was something akin to anarchy, a disease which often attacked unbalanced young men and paupers. Jim was not the latter, so they looked forward to Jim's acquittal as a matter of course, when he would

settle down as one of themselves, and leave socialism to demagogues and other charlatans—they were all wealthy. But Jim had other friends who did not use gold as the standard of measurement.

It was over 50 miles from the gaol to Boorana. Jim wanted another interview with Kate. The effect of meeting her in public was more than he would risk again, so he wrote to her, asking her to meet him on midnight of the following Thursday.

He sent the letter to an old schoolmate, asking him to re-address and re-mail it, with the additional request to hold his tongue. All requests were complied with.

On Thursday morning Jim started on his long ride, keeping to bye-ways and going across country as much as possible. He gave Kate the credit of an infinite finesse in getting him committed; while at the same time appearing to be a friendly witness, and he was burning with resentment to think he had been over-reached by someone whom he had thought was the perfection of simple honesty—with whom he had thought he could have played at leisure had he so chosen; but he had not chosen for the same reason that a big man refrains from hitting a little man.

He felt very much as a big man when he finds a little man playing with him. Scheme after scheme revolved through his mind, but he saw the unexpected in Kate might topple any one of them, as he could not foretell exactly what she would do. He had run up against the unknowable in woman, which most men appear to bewail, half incredulously, half in fear; which they alternately paint as a vice or a charm, wisdom or stupidity, devilment or divinity, and which no man ever decides to be one thing or the other till he is married; then he decides wrongly. Philosophers call it ignorance. Jim thought he was a philosopher. But he had never had a life and death struggle with a woman before. Philosophers never do, or we would have no philosophers. Jim had completely forgotten all the philosophy he ever knew; but he was a man, so he must act, some way or somehow. He rode through mile after mile of grand hill scenery, seeing none of it—a prey alternately to hope and fear. So that when he reached the slip-rails of Horeton's home pad-

dock, he had reached a stage of mental alertness which he thought was a kind of courage, and in reality was recklessness.

It was half-past eleven when he arrived. He hobbled his horse, and turned it loose on the grassy road; then sat down in the shadow of a broad gate post. A bright moon was setting in the west, which in twenty minutes dimly revealed a tall woman coming towards him through the dead timber.

They did not greet each other formally. Jim acknowledged her presence with a curt nod, by which she knew he was angry.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Does anyone else know you got my note?"

"Nobody but the postmistress."

"That's all right. Now what do you intend to do at the trial?" Jim had risen; there was a threat in both his attitude and tone.

"You saw how the evidence went at the inquest—I shall tell the simple truth."

She hoped he would see an offer of conciliation.

"You did that before; but knew it did not count after your visit. So you mean that you will persist in trying to get me gaoled for life unless I come to your terms." Kate was silent, trying to understand the object of his call, and disappointed that he did not see she was offering a compromise. "Don't you see that if I am imprisoned you will defeat your own object, for I shall probably get a sentence of 15 years?"

"If you do not consent it will mean exactly the same thing to my sister and me, so it seems, as far as we are concerned, it matters little whether you are free or not—unless you consent."

"Then you still persist?" questioned Jim, feeling angry at her cold-blooded way of putting it.

Kate was silently fighting with herself; she saw that he believed he was in her power. It came to her in a flash —that was why he was bargaining. In spite of herself, a feeling of elation surged through Kate—power of any kind was so novel to her. This man of whom she thought more than her own brother, than her own family, recognised his life was her's to do with what she willed. She

was facing the west, and smiled; it was very slightly, but it illumined her face with a joy that painters brush into the picture of a Madonna. Jim understood the legend of the sirens when he saw it, and felt like the Greeks of old, his heart throbbing with its fascination. He even thought of falling on his knees and telling her that he worshipped her. She was standing with her head thrown slightly back, her arms behind her, erect as a goddess, with that bright gleam of triumph and love, her features radiant in the moonlight.

But Jim was Christianised, and of the 19th century. He turned his head away with a suppressed moan. He thought that if her love had been for him she would never have stipulated that he should marry her sister. He was logical—and lost.

But he would never marry her sister. One of the schemes that had flitted through his head on the way took form, though he knew he risked his life in it. He deliberately turned and looked away from her, switching the post with his riding whip as he began speaking—

"You saw all the details of my fight with your brother, Miss Horeton; but what you didn't see, and never knew, was the intention of our quarrel. You knew that your brother resented my attention to Miss Warren"—Jim spoke formally and deliberately—"but you did not know that while you were out of earshot, he suggested that we should fight to the death, as he knew that if one of us was to fall or be knocked off the rock, it meant almost certain death on the boulders below. It was really a duel. The fight was fair, but to kill in a duel in our country is to murder. There was one thing in my favour of which he was ignorant, and it was that he was absolutely unskilled in that kind of fighting. Still, he tried to take an unfair advantage by rushing me unprepared. You saw me strike his hand down with a stick, then he rushed at me again. I could have knocked him over with my fist then, but my fist mark on his face would have indicated a more serious intention to hurt him, so I struck him on the chest. Next time it was with my open hand—the result you know."

Jim was trembling when he finished, and turned to see the effect of his words. It horrified him. Even in the

now faint moonlight he saw that Kate was white to the lips. He thought she was going to faint, but Kate had never fainted in her life, though she nearly shrieked in her misery, and felt herself growing hysterical. Then she stepped to him and gripped his arm fiercely.

"You—you——" she began. Then an idea halted her. "Tell me, are you sure—sure—it was fair? Are you sure he intended to kill you? Oh, how I wish he had—or—or me." She released him, and sank on her knees, wringing her hands. Jim moved away a step, frightened and puzzled—hopelessly puzzled again.

"Why you?" he asked ingenuously.

"What's that to you?" she answered, bitterly, and controlling herself.

"Of course, our fight was fair; do you think I would have told you this if it were not?"

"How do I know?" she asked. That brought Jim back to his story.

"I haven't finished yet," he said, in a tone similar to her's. She looked up.

"I have no wish to marry your sister, nor have I any wish to go to gaol for the best time of my life. But unless you can get me out of this mess, I shall relate everything you said to me on the day before the inquest. I have employed one of the cleverest barristers in Melbourne to defend me, and you can depend that he will make a fine story out of your attempt to coerce me, and use it as a very powerful lever to discount the value of anything I have told you to-night, for nobody knows we have met to-night but ourselves. Now you may insist on my marrying your sister if you like."

"When I made that proposal, I hoped, and really believed, that you were innocent of intentional murder, that my mother was blinded by her vindictive passion, and that my sister's opinion of your innocence was merited. I am not going to marry her to a murderer—and you can take your chance at your trial."

She spoke contemptuously. Before she had finished she was moving away, and threw the last sentence over her shoulder, leaving Jim with an honest man's contempt for himself as a successful liar.

But he felt safe—and sorry—without knowing exactly why.

## CHAPTER XXV.

Jim rode away with his lips tightly shut, trying hard to convince himself that what he had done was the wisest of wise steps to save his manhood.

"Domineered by a woman!" Every instinct of his sex rebelled against it in a feeling of impotent fury, which made him feel as if he could ride back and kill her. But why did she dismiss him with such contempt? Was it for his scheme, or him? Both ideas hurt equally. Then her horror and pain when he told her he had killed Harry intentionally. After all, she must have loved her brother very deeply. Jim had very sentimental ideals about brother and sister affection, which was part of the reason why he could not understand Kate. He had often wondered what sort of family Horeton's must be that Kate was willing to scheme and plan so dangerously. Jim had heard of such families amongst the great; but could not understand Horeton's, in the light of his own preconceived ideas concerning it. Kate and Nell looked well cared for, and were always well dressed; seemed to have their simple pleasures, able to invite people to the house, and even to give a large ball. So her talk then about her home wretchedness was but a part of her scheme; something to give it the appearance of a reasonable excuse, forgetting apparently her own and her sister's appearance of comfort. Therefore, she was only a common adventuress—and the daughter of a wealthy man, came another idea as an anti-climax.

Daybreak found him another 20 miles on his way to Melbourne, 3 miles from a township, and his horse knocked up. Seventy miles straight off the grass was too much for it. There was a farm house just visible in a valley to the left of him. Tying the horse to a tree, he lay down till it was light enough to go and make arrangements to graze his horse. He was dog tired, and fell asleep almost as soon as his head touched the saddle. It was midday when he awakened, stiff as a board and

hungry as a drought-stricken sheep.

The farm people looked at him suspiciously when he arrived, and fell in with his suggestion with more hesitation than he thought was polite. At last it was arranged on his producing a sovereign in advance. He bought a meal and stole a wash, so the farmer reported him to the police as a suspicious character. After a ten-mile walk Jim arrived at a station, in time to catch the afternoon train, and in two hours more was in Melbourne.

The city looked queer and strange to him. There seemed something inhuman in its perfect indifference to his affairs. It was spring when he left, midsummer now; but the trees in full foliage scarcely seemed a sufficient explanation of the difference. He did not know yet that the change was in himself.

He passed many of his acquaintances in Collins-street, some of whom looked at him askance; others in just the same manner as before he went away. A few seemed inclined to stop and question him, but altered their minds on seeing an unpleasant scowl on his face, for the mood in which he had left Kate was still on him.

He had sent no word of his coming to his aunt, and had no baggage; so he walked straight to the office of the barrister his friends had engaged for him. When the off-hand office boy asked Jim to step inside, Mr. Alston came out to meet him. They scrutinised each other closely; then went straight to business, impressed in each other's favour.

"You seem to have got yourself into an uncommon mess," said Mr. Alston, as he led the way into the inner office.

Jim told him everything from beginning to end—even to Kate's threats and to his last meeting with her on the previous night. As he proceeded the lawyer's face went graver and graver.

"You have made the usual mistake of not consulting a lawyer before you attempted to move. You ought to have had me at the inquest; then have consulted me before you ever saw Miss Horeton again, as everything you have done since the inquest has its 'legal' significance. Now, are you sure no one saw you meet Miss Horetop

last night?"

"As humanly certain as I can be."

"What about the people with whom you left your horse?"

"They were a suspicious crowd, but took me for a tramp, who had perhaps stolen the horse."

"Give me a list of all the people with whom you were intimate in Boorana, and I'll see if I can't rake up some circumstantial evidence in your favour. Let's see. Hunter's the Government prosecutor in your district. Judge Trite will be on the Bench—good man, fond of ladies. What sort of woman is Miss Horeton to look at?"

"What's that to do with the case?"

"A pretty face often decides with a jury more than the evidence, specially when the only evidence comes from the pretty face owner."

"She's about the handsomest woman I've ever seen, and I've seen a lot."

"Whew!" whistled the lawyer, "and you told her that you had killed her brother intentionally, though in a fair fight. She has only to play the distressed sister, and you are done for. Still, there are many things I can't make out. Family rows don't seem quite enough to explain her demand that you should marry her sister." The lawyer glanced keenly at Jim, and saw he was an upstanding man, just the kind to attract a primitive-minded woman, apart from his money. His face brightened a little; it looked something like a key to the situation. He kept it to himself.

"The whole trouble in your case is the appearance of collusion between you and Miss Horeton. That will have to be explained away somehow; specially as it is known that she and her brother were never particularly friendly till you came into the district. Your case lay in proving her guilty of conspiracy, and that you spoilt by your silly confession. Then it would be hard to get a jury to believe a woman could use her brother's death as a means of getting his slayer to marry her sister. There is nothing in the case involving deep law points—purely one of fact, complicated by emotion. Did you ever make love to Miss Horeton?"

"No."

"Have you any reason to think she has any affection for you?"

Jim laughed outright.

"Do you think she'd have threatened to hang me, or marry me to her sister, if she had?"

"I don't—quite—know," said Alston, very slowly. Then he rose. "I shall go to Boorana, and see if I can't hear of something important; gossip often puts a fellow on the right track."

Jim rose, too.

"I shall go home to my place at Elsternwick; send if you want me."

Jim's aunt was sitting alone under a tree in the garden when his hansom drove up. She saw him before he reached the iron-barred gate, and, dropping her sewing, ran down to meet him, with such a bright glance of honest love that Jim felt hot in the eyes. He realised now what it was to have someone care for him unconditionally. The sight of it drove tight-lipped doubt and suspicion from his mouth, and made him a boy again. He met her with the same old joyous laugh of his earlier years. Arm in arm they walked back to the house. Then she took him by the shoulders, and, turning him to the light, she scanned his face closely, her own growing sad as she looked.

"Oh, Jimmy, my boy, what's wrong?"

"I had no sleep to speak of last night—slept in a paddock, and have had nothing to eat."

She bustled inside, and soon had the servants flying round. When Jim had finished his bath the meal was ready. When he was satisfied his aunt said to him—

"Well, Jim?"

"Come outside, mum; I don't feel like sleeping now."

When they were comfortably seated in the dark, he answered her.

"It's a failure, mum."

"I see you've been in trouble, my boy. Is it a woman?"

To his aunt he told nearly as much as to the lawyer. When he finished she was walking up and down the verandah in a state of suppressed rage.

"I didn't think of it at the time you wrote to me about

that family; but this business clears up Miss Horeton's nature and intentions beautifully. Her father was in some way connected with yours in business—I never knew exactly how—and did him an injury, for which he hated your father cordially, as usual. Miss Horeton then is probably directed by her father in some devilish scheme inspired by fear, for she must see as well as I can that you're fascinated by her pretty face. Now, don't look astonished. That fool of a lawyer must have seen it, too. It was that she used to lever you into marrying her sister."

"But she doesn't want me to marry her sister now."

"And never did. She had a fine excuse to get out of it after your confession, as you call it. Of course, you can take your chance—the choice between fifteen years in gaol or worse. The scheming hussy! But it's in a woman's blood. Simple-minded indeed! Fine proof of her simple mindedness you have given me! Women are born intriguers, Jim; it was bred into them when the first man used a club to teach her fidelity ages ago. Men are paying for it now; you, too. Oh, Jim, I wish I could help you. There's another woman, Miss Warren. Did you ever make love to her?" Jim shook his head. "About what used you talk to her?"

"Science, art, travel—everything but ourselves."

"Was she interested?" Jim nodded.

"Did she like Miss Horeton?"

"I don't think so."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty certain."

"Do you know why?"

"I can't explain it, unless it was that she wasn't as pretty."

"Humph!" said Jim's aunt, looking at him doubtfully. "Was she ever engaged to young Horeton?"

"There was some rumour to that effect."

"Did you see anything to lead you to think so?"

"They seemed rather affectionate when I first went there."

"Didn't they afterwards?"

"Well, no—Horeton blamed me for it."

She looked at Jim inscrutably.

"Send her name at once to Alston."

"I gave it him amongst others."

"Say it's very important then."

She ceased questioning, and sat thinking for a moment; then turned suddenly to Jim and said—"Now, my boy, you're looking tired. Go into bed, and forget all about this miserable business for as long as you can; you'll have plenty of reason to remember it for the rest of your life before you're done with it."

She spoke half banteringly. When he had gone her head drooped, and the tears rose to her eyes freely. With the experience of her years, she saw Jim's trouble was worse than he yet realised; and with the unconscious pessimism of age she anticipated the worst. She saw that every shuffle in the events of the near future, the chances were big odds against him; but what gave terror to the recognition was that his fate was in the hands of a woman—and she the daughter of his father's enemy. She bent forward, and silently wept and prayed for him. While Jim dreamt that he was another Orpheus torn by the three furies, Kate, Mary Warren, and his aunt.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Kate crept into her room like a thief, and, undressing, slipped into bed beside Nell, who was asleep. It awakened her.

"Where have you been; you're quite cold, Kate?" Kate hugged her silently. "What is the matter with you, Kate? I can't understand all this mystery. Why have you been wandering round at this time of the night? Did mother want you for anything?"

"No; don't ask me, Nell," whispered Kate.

Nell put her arms round her neck and desisted, in hearing the misery in Kate's voice.

Much to their surprise next morning, their mother was at the general superintendence of the house again. As the day wore on, they noticed her manner was taking on a new and to them uncouth kindliness. Nell did not understand it in the least, and, therefore, gave up bothering her head about it. Kate thought she saw its purpose, on noticing her mother seemed to single her out more particularly. As the days passed, there was a steady improvement in their relations. Nell began to expand under it. All the brightness of her health and youth began to show in a tendency to sing, suppressed only when the shadow of Harry flitted through her memory. What pleased her most was seeing that her mother had apparently quite recovered from her grief, except that sometimes she would be found on the verandah, with her hands idly resting on her knitting, and a grim look darkening her face, but which instantly vanished when Nell appeared. Too pleased with the present, Nell did not try to see the meaning of the change. Kate was still suspicious. It was she who troubled Nell most, for it was quite obvious that Kate was secretly troubled. There were dark rings under her eyes, which seemed to have come permanently. In her work Nell often saw she was absent-minded, putting things in places they never were before, and then forgetting where she put them. It made

Nell vaguely irritable, till she even spoke sharply to her at times. But Kate always looked at her as if she were listening to other words, which had no connection with what Nell was saying. Then Nell was sorry, feeling as if she had punished a child unjustly; and, like a child, Kate looked at her so pitifully that Nell felt inclined to slip away and cry, or do something ridiculously sentimental. Instead, she found herself doing more and more of Kate's share of the work, inventing elaborate excuses for sending her to the township, or insisting upon her walking for the sake of exercise and fresh air.

Then their mother surprised them. She hired a young woman to do all the drudgery. That her altered manner towards them should take such a practical form indicated to them a big alteration. Nell was delighted. But the line of thought Kate had developed between her eyebrows deepened. She was wondering what her mother's real motive was. She was very like her mother in some respects; but accepted the change without remark. Nell did not.

"The loss of Harry seems to have softened mother wonderfully, Kate."

"Do you think it really has?" There was something in her tone that sounded like indifference or suspicion. Nell looked at her rapidly.

"What has come over you, Kate? Are you unwell?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I am. Nothing matters much lately—not even the wish to go away."

"I've not thought of that for a long time. Everything seems so changed; even father looks more tired than he used to."

"Or frightened. Mr. Smith's trial comes off in a few days."

"What should he be frightened of?"

"I don't know. He has been looking a little scared ever since Mr. Smith came here."

"But look how much kinder mother has been to us."

"She doesn't look kind when she thinks no one sees her."

"I have noticed that, too; but supposed she was brooding over Harry."

The stockman told them when he sat down to his tea that night that he had seen the missus on the Table rock late the previous night.

"Are you certain it was mother?" asked Kate.

"I've seen her there half a dozen times the last fortnight."

It strengtheend Kate's suspicion, and Nell's idea that she was only brooding when looking grim.

As the day of Smith's trial approached, Kate grew more troubled. She did not want to believe his story of the duel. Sometimes it appeared a clumsy invention; but the circumstances, and his method of telling her, pointed to its being true. Was he really a murderer then? And if he were, what should she do? The need to decide was becoming imperative, and a feverish restlessness possessed her, sometimes showing itself in flashes of fierce irritation, at others in long hours wasted in sullen brooding. She listened eagerly to every rumour, which spoke uncertainty about everything but Mary's engagement to Smith. Kate knew Mary had denied it; and knew equally well that she would admit or deny it, according to whether it suited her purpose or not. Mary's purpose had been clear to Kate's eyes ever since she had seen her and Jim together on Mrs. Warren's verandah.

She believed Jim an honourable man, and that to invent such a confession as he had made was impossible to him. Time after time she reached this conclusion, which was followed by another attack of misery and despair. Often she longed for Nell's calm assurance of his innocence; and would wonder how Nell would have taken his confession. Would she like him to marry Nell now? A storm of angry dismay sweeping through was the answer. Then why wasn't the objection as applicable to herself? Steadily and surely she was bringing herself to believe the confession, and that he must suffer the penalty of his crime. Her will working directly against her heart. At bottom she was instinctively just, and plain justice demanded his punishment. Then the report of Mr. Alston's visit in search of evidence reached her; also that the police were extremely active on the other side. To the first she was indifferent; to the second she re-

sponded with a longer fit of despondency. But it made up her mind, pathetically ignorant of the fact that any evidence she thought of giving was entirely powerless to either acquit or condemn—even after her experience at the inquest. But having come to the belief that its result was the effect of her intention, her conclusion was, therefore, obvious.

The real danger for Jim lay in her final determination to tell the truth. Mrs. Horeton saved him.

The day before the trial was hot and sunny, with a north wind drying up the grass. Mrs. Horeton was sitting on the south verandah, her fingers idle, and haltingly trying to make up her mind to interview Kate. She was half frightened, for of late she had seen more and thought more of her elder daughter than she ever imagined she would have time for; and had seen, with a sort of alarm, that her character had been slowly and hardily forming amidst neglect, till she realised Kate was fully capable of thinking and acting entirely on her own initiative. She did not suspect how much Kate had acted for herself; but in her mind there was a suspicion arising that she had lost all the influence which was rightly her's as a mother, resenting it none the less bitterly, though the fault was her own.

Her memory ran rapidly over the events of the inquest. The interview with Smith she could not understand, and never candidly sought the reason for it, and thought of it now with a kind of fear. Yet, thinking over the coroner's summing up, and direction to the jury, she remembered that it was the collusion between Kate and Smith that led to his commitment, and put it down as the result of deep cunning on Kate's part, of which the very cleverness alarmed her, suggesting an unsuspected ability in Kate that might cut both ways. She, then, determined not to order, but to persuade Kate into continuing her line of action against Smith. The conclusion was not arrived at hastily; it was the result of three weeks' hard thought, combined with a fortnight's close observation of Kate, though it took her all the afternoon to resolve to act upon a resolution reached, by convincing herself Kate had only to be asked in order to consent.

After tea she asked Kate, gently, to come to her room. That had always meant something unpleasant to the girls. When young, a switching; when older, a severe scolding. They glanced apprehensively towards each other, Kate's face paling a little. Nell merely thought something had gone amiss with the household affairs, as usual. Kate knew better.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Mrs. Horeton was on a couch with her back to the window, her lips twitching in an effort to appear smiling, the painful result of her desire to look soft and persuasive. Kate was given to observing her mother closely, particularly when she expected a storm. This time she was expecting one of unusual severity, and was proportionately surprised at all the portents of a calm.

"Sit down, my child," said Mrs. Horeton, nodding to a chair on the other side of the hearth. "I have something important to say."

"Yes, mother," answered Kate, nearly missing the chair in her surprise at her mother's gentle formality, only saving a fall by an undignified scramble.

"I've been thinking," began Mrs. Horeton, slowly, "now—now—that such a big alteration has taken place in the family that I might take you girls away—away to the city. Anywhere away from here. How old are you now, my child?"

"Nearly 23," said Kate, watching her mother intently, who moved a little uneasily.

"You and Helen have had very little amusement of late." She only meant for three weeks; but the time had seemed immeasurably long to her. "And you're not looking very well," she ended, quickly, noticing the dark rings under Kate's eyes.

"I'm all right, mother," replied Kate, flushing nervously.

"You don't look it, my child, and I think a change would do us all good."

"Yes, mother," said Kate, half expectantly, half indifferently.

"But we all have our duty to do before we can please ourselves. Do you think Helen would like a change, too?"

"I really don't know, mother; she has never spoken about going away—at least, that way."

"In what way, then?" asked Mrs. Horeton, quickly.

"None in particular—that is, you know; at least, I suppose you know—that we—that she has sometimes talked of marriage. I suppose all girls do that sooner or later."

Mrs. Horeton looked surprised.

"Of course, I never thought of that somehow. She is of a marriageable age, as well as you." She was silent till Kate moved restlessly; then she looked up with a slight start.

"That's it," she said, abruptly; "I shall take you girls away from here. Our money will open the doors of all society to us, and with my experience of the world" (she had never been away from her house for a week since Harry was born) "I shall be able to introduce you to men who will make good husbands; and when you marry, I think I shall be able to induce your father to give you a—a suitable wedding present," she ended lamely.

She was sparring for an opportunity to open; and Kate did not feel inclined to supply it.

"Yes, mother," she answered, without enthusiasm.

"What do you think Helen would like, and you, too?"

"I can hardly say. I at least have not thought of marrying. I don't know about Nell—Helen," she corrected.

A light leapt into Mrs. Horeton's eyes, whether triumph or pleasure it was difficult to say.

"Are you certain Helen doesn't?" She spoke very softly.

"She has never spoken about marrying, except in a general way. There is no one in Boorana who——" Kate stopped abruptly.

"Well?" anxiously.

"There is Mr. Solomon——"

"Who?" interrupted Mrs. Horeton, with a light gasp of relief and astonishment.

"Mr. Solomon; he seems inclined to—to—court her."

"Pay attention. 'Court' sounds crude," said Mrs. Horeton. Kate smiled at this new phase of her mother.

"To pay attention, then," said Kate. "Nell—Helen, I mean, only laughs at the idea."

"Apart from his peculiar religious views, I think he would be scarcely rich enough," said Mrs. Horeton, with a slight shrug of contempt for a mere wage-earner.

"Does money make all the difference?" asked Kate, ingenuously.

"Of course," answered her mother, surprisedly. "Do you think we could have been happy without it?"

"Do you mean you and father?"

"I mean all of us, my child. We have all been very happy till—recently." She paused at the last word.

"You and father and Harry have perhaps. Helen and I have not."

A flash of anger fled across Mrs. Horeton's face.

"You seem to have had a very peculiar idea of happiness. Haven't I taught you, through your religion, that happiness lies in living for others? I gave up my whole life for my son."

"There were three of us, mother; you gave up ours to him, too."

Mrs. Horeton put a severe restraint on her temper.

"We shall not enter that. I did what I thought best for us all—for our name. It depended upon my son. I gave up my name and home for my husband, as you will to yours. But my son is dead." She muttered the last sentence to herself, wearily. Kate rose.

"Sit down, my girl; I have something more to say to you."

"You look too tired, mother, and had better lie down."

For the first time in her life, Kate spoke to her mother as an equal. Its effect surprised her. Mrs. Horeton rose, and placing her hand on her shoulder, said softly—

"You and father and Helen are all I have left now."

She raised the waves of hair from Kate's forehead, and kissed it gently, awkwardly. Kate sat rigid, but felt her mother trembling a little.

"I shall lie down now, and you can sit beside me, for I am lonely." Her voice was low. Her loneliness real. A sudden gush of pity made Kate's eyes humid. But a swift glance from her mother as she rose from the couch dried them instantly.

The bed was an old-fashioned, heavily curtained, wooden affair, which almost completely shadowed Mrs.

Horeton's face, as she lay down, breathing a deep sigh.

At her first word almost Kate's muscles tightened tensely.

"I am growing old and weak. Since Harry went before me, I have no longer anything to live for. He was to be my stay—yours and your father's; but the Lord, in His wisdom, has taken him from me—from us. But I have my duty to do, my child. We all have our duty to do. I must stay and look after your father and my two girls—that will be my remaining pleasure. I had held such ambitious schemes for us all when—when—Harry came into the property"—Kate was beginning to feel prepared for anything. "There are the Welstroms; they have less land than we, yet they supply the member for the county; but everything was to have come when Harry got the land. He would have invited all the young people over, and you would have married, perhaps some young gentleman lord"—she meant a lord's younger son—"such as the Welstroms sometimes have staying with them; for Harry always thought you were pretty, both of you. He was a good judge, too. But your father did not think his judgment good in anything; he could not see so deeply as my eyes. He is without the insight that only great love gives." Kate started. Her mother thought she had made a strong impression; so she had, but not in the way Mrs. Horeton imagined. "I think his sisters understood him, better than his father; for you always willingly did everything he wished." Kate looked down at her mother, and found she was watching her closely from under half-shut lids. Kate straightened all expression out of her face. "How he loved you for it; he was always thinking of some little pleasure for you—driving, tennis, and dances. It was he who suggested the ball." Kate began to see where Harry had inherited his intelligence. "We did not want to ask the bank clerk here"—her voice fell and quavered a little—"but Harry insisted, though we suspected the heavy risk of having our worst enemy in the house. It cost him his life." She was silent for a few moments, and asked for some water. When Kate sat down again, she had moved her chair a foot away from the bed. "Duty, my child, is the highest law. It is our duty to punish the wicked; more so when

we know the wickedness was long and deliberately planned. Even if we cannot punish directly, we must try and see that they do not profit by their wickedness. Mr. Smith cannot profit in any pecuniary way by his, for he has all the money he needs. His liberty and life are his sole profit now; but the Lord has already manifested His will towards him. He must stand his trial for his very life, perhaps, for taking the life of my son." She sighed deeply—Kate thought unctuously, though she did not know the word to describe it. "I have the right to know, my child, why you of all people went to meet the slayer of my son. But you are my daughter—his sister—and that is sufficient to tell me that whatever its object, it was not a wrong one." Kate did not know whether it was or not exactly; had never thought about it from an ethical point of view much; but she very clearly saw her mother's offer of a bribe was rather clumsy. Mrs. Horeton continued—"It is entirely between you and your conscience, yet I believe you are as well convinced that Smith is a murderer as if he had told you himself." Kate's whole body quivered so much that she was glad the chair was no longer beside the bed. If Mrs. Horeton had known enough to be silent then, she might have gained her end. "You know why I am convinced—you must forgive me the passion I showed when I first spoke about this matter to you. But, my child, I want you—beg of you—implore you, to do nothing more than your duty, and punish my son's—your brother's murderer."

She had just talked on long enough for Kate to recover from the thrust her mother had unconsciously given, and watched with surprise Kate's paling face. A deep line came slowly between her eyebrows, as slowly a tremendous anger surged through her; while her eyes shone with a still, frozen glitter, that expressed a sort of contempt for herself equally with her mother. She replied without raising her voice, only a little more slowly than was her wont—

"You never took the trouble before to find out whether we had any ideas beyond an abject submission to your selfish love for Harry, so you never discovered that our only hope was to get out of this house, away from

you. We liked Harry as much as you permitted us, and if you had made less of a selfish brute of him we might even have loved him. His attention to us you mentioned was not through affection, but part of a scheme to get Mary Warren, whom he knew you hated, to come here, that he might court her, and he had every intention, in spite of your dislike, of eventually marrying her. But worst of all, it was the selfishness your blind devotion trained into him which made him hate Mr. Smith, because he saw that Mary Warren would have chosen Mr. Smith had he given her the chance. It was this alone that led to the quarrel, which was entirely of Harry's seeking, for Mr. Smith tried to avoid it the first time Harry forced it on him"—Mrs. Horeton began to breathe quickly; Kate stood up and continued—"I do not think Mr. Smith is aware that his father knew ours, or he would have told me when I met him before the inquest. As for hating us—he does worse; he looks upon us with the indifference of contempt." Kate's head drooped a little; but she drew herself erect again immediately. Mrs. Horeton gasped. Kate proceeded relentlessly—"I have something worse to tell you, though it is worse to us than you, for our feelings were never of much interest to you. It is that Nell thinks in such a manner of Mr. Smith that she laughs at the idea of his having murdered Harry." Kate suddenly stopped; then resumed a little more slowly—"And I think of him in such a manner that, even if I knew he was Harry's murderer, I would follow him to—to——" She paused in search of a word. Mrs. Horeton was perfectly still—"the devil," said Kate, quietly, "if he would give me the smallest sign."

It took Mrs. Horeton nearly five minutes to recover, while Kate stared through the window at the paddocks shimmering under the heat, without seeing them, and trying to grasp the full meaning of her revelation, as much a revelation to herself as her mother. As clearly as if she had spoken it, Kate saw her mother's doubt of Jim's guilt—and had deliberately offered a bribe to hang him. Through all her own vacillation, there had never been a doubt of her mother's sincerity till now; and it brought crashing about her ears the habit and instinct of respect the worst treated child unconsciously

builds round its mother. She thought herself bad—and had found her mother worse. And in a moment all consideration of everything but the man she loved vanished.

Her attention was suddenly drawn to her mother by a splutter, which was the effect of an effort to speak.

"Curse you! Curse you!" she uttered at last, in a low, husky shriek. "May your children turn on you as you have turned on me, and make your old age as bitter as you have made mine." Kate listened stonily. "But you can't save him. You'll never be able to explain satisfactorily why you called on him. They'll begin to think you abetted Mr. Smith in killing Harry to become heiress to the property, and so marry Smith on equal terms." A look of fear and horror came into Kate's face. "Curse you!" continued Mrs. Horeton, with new energy, inspired by the idea. "I'll see to it that they think it. I'll do my best to damn you in the eyes of all honest men and women." Mrs. Horeton lost control of herself, her voice becoming strident as she heaped curse on curse, evil thought after evil thought, on Kate, till she almost screamed, sitting up in the bed with her thin grey hair shaking about her shoulders in wisps like darting snakes, her deep-set eyes blazing with an insane rage. Its intensity exhausted her at last, and she spoke rationally, but still in a suppressed scream—"I'll give you till after the trial to-morrow. But if that man goes free through any effort of yours, I'll drive you to the devil myself, to a hell that will have no smooth path of love or pleasure to ease the way."

Kate heard Mr. Horeton's footsteps on the verandah; she went out and met him in the passage.

"I think mother is mad: you had better go to her."

Kate met Nell at the kitchen door. Nell had heard some of the curses her mother had hurled at Kate, and was watching for her with terror in her eyes. But when she saw Kate's face closely, she went silently away to cry alone—and bitterly. Johnston's curse had fulfilled itself.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The weather was perfect when Kate rose next morning —so clear and bright, so warm and fresh, that she was vaguely saddened at the contradiction between her mood and the outward aspect of things. Although she had made up her mind to save Jim at any cost, re-action came with the light, and made her for a time apathetic; but there was no denying that little piece of blue paper, while she was too obviously healthy for a doctor to write her a professional lie.

The court was to sit on Smith's case early in the afternoon. Horeton determined to drive over, rather than go by the much quicker method of the train; starting early, to miss any other people who might be driving. His new prominence was leading him a life of constant alarm and dread; he was expecting every stranger to look at him askance, every friend to greet his hand with ostentatious blindness. It gave him a nervousness about shaking hands, which made his friends remark that he was getting very shaky with grief and age, and also made them a little more sympathetic, which he dimly understood, and only grew the more nervous. He had done his act of swindling after convincing himself that Smith and Johnston would have done exactly the same thing in his place, if they had found out the illegality of the agreement between him and them; then had tried his best to convince himself that he was bound by no law outside what the legal code prescribed. He saw there was a kind of opinion which makes a gambling debt more binding than a debt to a tradesman; but he had been brought up to think gambling debts dishonourable; then tried to convince himself that in entering a bond which was against the laws of the country, it was on a par with a gambling debt. As long as nothing cropped up as a direct or indirect result of his conduct, he never thought there was any reason to fear any consequences of his swindle. There was a grain of superstition in him, which the ar-

rival of Smith aroused, and which Harry's death caused to flourish exceedingly. Inside him somewhere he began to hear a small voice saying, insistently, "Justice —justice—it is just."

He and Kate spoke but little to each other during the drive, mainly because they had so much to speak about that they did not know how or where to begin; while the lack of real sympathy between them made the beginning too difficult to overcome. The big stockman was on the back seat; he, too, was silent, except for an occasional remark about the condition of the grass and stock in the paddocks they passed.

When they arrived at Beechworth, the hotel was almost empty. When the train arrived an hour afterwards, it brought nearly everyone connected with the case, including Jim and a lot of curiosity-mongers from Boorana. The hotel became crowded, and Horeton shrank into his room with Kate.

Kate was unaccustomed to a greater publicity than that of the tennis court and Boorana, so she had provided herself with a veil. She wore a simple black dress, which displayed her fine figure perfectly, and from the concealment of her veil was able to see the wondering and admiring glances of all who looked at her as she walked on her father's arm to the courthouse. It gave her a strange, new feeling of pleasure, and strengthened her confidence in herself at the coming trial.

The formalities of the court were strange to her. The judge awesome, his pale face made yellow under its whitey grey wig, accentuated by his red gown. The court was full. Glancing round, she saw all the familiar faces from Boorana, and a lot more she did not know. Not far away were Mrs. Warren and Mary. The latter glanced at her superciliously; the former kindly. Just then Jim was brought in, accompanied by a policeman, and placed in the dock. Kate glanced at him swiftly, glad that the veil hid the hot blood which rushed into her cheeks. He was pale, and looked anxious; but bore no trace of fear. She saw him look towards her; but was unable to say whether it was with indifference or contempt. She was reckless of both from him now. The

procedure in opening the trial seemed a lot of queer mummery. She asked her father the meaning of it. He replied that it was a necessary technicality.

"Is the judge's wig one, too?" But she became too absorbed in the indictment the judge's associate was reading to wait for her father's answer. Then Jim was formally questioned, and pleaded not guilty. Kate was half surprised, as she had a romantic kind of idea that he would not tell a lie under any circumstances. "But his fight was fair," she thought in his excuse; "it is the law which makes it an offence."

Then the Crown Prosecutor rose and outlined what he proposed to prove. Kate listened with horrified astonishment. He took it for granted that murder had been committed, and painted Jim as a consummate scoundrel, herself as the victim of her own simplicity, and Jim's experienced hypocrisy.

Then he proceeded to cross-examine all the witnesses who had appeared at the inquest. They could say nothing more than they had said then. He called witnesses who had seen Kate and Jim meet in Boorana. At last he called Kate herself. As she entered the box, the low hum of whispered conversation was hushed, and every eye was turned towards her. When she raised her veil to kiss the Bible, the judge's face, for a fleeting moment, lost its severe, abstracted look. The Crown Prosecutor muttered "By George!" under his breath; Mr. Alston looked at her with a thoughtful frown. A little boy in the side of the court gurgled "O—O-h" ecstatically, and was promptly put out. Kate glanced at Mary Warren, and saw poorly concealed envy, mixed with an unwilling admiration, in her eyes. The Crown Prosecutor unconsciously became more deferential, but he only got from her exactly the same tale as she had told at the inquest—which showed that, as far as she had seen, the fall of her brother was the mere accident of a quarrel. Alston was immensely surprised. The only witness he really feared was giving perfectly friendly evidence. In a flash he remembered the idea that had come to him, when Jim was telling him the incidents leading to his committal, which was that Miss Horeton might be in love with his client. His face cleared. But the Crown

Prosecutor was looking puzzled. He was examining her under the impression that she was for the prosecution.

Alston did not bother with cross-examining the previous witnesses. He called Mary Warren. She related the details of her interview with Harry on the night of the ball, just as she had told them to her mother. Mr. Horeton looked startled on hearing that his son had proposed to Mary, and when he heard how Harry had threatened to kill Mr. Smith, he felt the whole situation had gone beyond him. Was, then, Smith innocent of intention to kill Harry after all? Mary's evidence showed clearly that Harry was passionate enough, wilful enough, to attempt it, and indicated that Smith had in all probability killed Harry in an accidentally vigorous self-defence. Kate thought it somehow disagreed with Jim's story of a pugilistic duel; yet thought it was more like the Harry she knew. Then she saw Mary look at Jim with a kind of subdued triumph, in which there was a subtle invitation. Kate was woman enough to understand, and instantly put the evidence down as a concoction to save Jim for her own ends. Jim looked at Mary with surprised gratitude.

In reply to further questions, Mary went on to say that Mr. Smith had always referred to Mr. Horeton with good-humoured toleration as a mother's spoilt darling. Mr. Alston sat down. The Crown Prosecutor rose.

"Miss Warren, were you ever engaged to Mr. Henry Horeton?"

"No," answered Mary.

"How was it that he was able to speak to you as if he were?"

"It was presumption on his part," she said, looking annoyed.

"Men don't presume like that unless they have very good reason for it. Now, were you ever engaged to the prisoner?" He acted suspicion admirably.

"No."

"Did you ever have any reason to think he would perhaps propose to you?"

Mary blushed.

"To answer that question would be presumption on my part; a man is nothing but a friend till he actually

proposes, which Mr. Smith never did." Kate now understood the purpose of Mary's evidence.

"You are sure the prisoner didn't intentionally kill Mr. Horeton?"

Here the judge interrupted, and said it was facts, not opinions, they were seeking. Then Mary left the witness box and sat down beside her mother, decidedly pleased with herself, and hoping Jim was as pleased with her, too. He was only staring stonily at the judge, and started slightly when he heard Miss Horeton called again. She stepped into the witness box whiter than when she first entered. Then Alston put the question she was dreading, and knew was inevitable, "Can you explain exactly what took you to Boorana to interview Mr. Smith the day previous to the inquest? If this question had been put and answered satisfactorily then, this trial would have been unnecessary." Kate was silent.

"You admit that you sought him out?"

"Yes."

"Had it anything to do with your brother's death?"

"There was a connection between the two events."

"You and the prisoner were the only actual witnesses to the death of your brother. Was the meeting to arrange the suppression of any detail of your evidence?" Kate looked directly at him.

"No," she answered. Jim's eyelids fluttered; he was beginning to feel surprised.

"You say there was a connection between the two events; can you say what that connection was?" Kate was silent.

"We might ask the prisoner; but you must know that his word would have but little weight." Kate was still silent.

"Were you and the prisoner ever engaged?"

"No." Mary Warren looked relieved.

"Did the prisoner ever say anything to you to cause you to believe he felt any sentiment towards you?"

"No." She tried to look as if she were lying—and succeeded. Mary turned white.

"Did you ever give him any cause to think you cared for him?" She looked up with a startled blush, and was silent again. After the lapse of a few moments the judge

gravely remarked—

"It is necessary that you should answer, Miss Horeton." It flashed through her mind to say "No" would not be true; but, worst of all, it might endanger Jim's life or liberty. She could say all her previous evidence was a lie, and fulfil her threat to Jim, and know that according to Jim's confession, she would only be furthering the ends of justice. The court was watching her expectantly.

"Yes," she little more than whispered.

"In what way was your sentiment connected with the prisoner and your brother's death?" The court stirred uneasily.

"I was the only eye-witness—I tried to coerce him to—to——" (she was meaningly silent) "with the threat of hostility."

"Then it was in your own interest that made you visit Mr. Smith—the interest of your affection?" Alston was looking away from her as he put the question. Jim made a movement as if to go to her—to speak to her. Her father felt every muscle in his body stiffen. The silence was growing painful.

"Yes," she said, lowly, but clearly.

She never remembered clearly what subsequently happened, though she saw Jim look up quickly and heard him say "Your Honour," and wondered why his head suddenly drooped and hung low. But all she cared for was that he was free. Then the Crown Prosecutor rose, his face suffused with emotion. He summed all the evidence given by the witnesses; then came down to Kate's.

"It is well known to all the parties concerned in this case that the prisoner is a wealthy man; but it is also well known that the possession of wealth is no bar against the desire of greater wealth. It was notorious that Mr. Horeton intended to leave the great bulk of his fortune to his only son, and the prisoner was probably well aware of a fact which was well known to everyone else. The rest was simple—he would court one of the Misses Horeton; then get rid of the brother. This seems far-fetched—it may even seem incredible; but a long familiarity with crime has shown me that everything is possible to a man with a mania for money—and a woman in love.

Taking a situation as a bank clerk, on a paltry salary of £80 a year, has no possible explanation, except as a deep-laid scheme to find out the real wealth of a man reputedly very wealthy." The Crown Prosecutor slapped his brief on the table. "Unfortunately for himself, and the bereaved family, his position in the bank gave him all the information he sought. It is true that Mr. Horeton had withdrawn all his deeds, and transferred his account to another bank before the arrival of the prisoner; but the books had to be balanced after his arrival. So it was then easy for him to form a correct idea of Mr. Horeton's financial position. The rest was easy. Having the reputation of an honest man and a gentleman, trying the more completely to hide his felonious purposes under the guise of vague assertions about the equality of man, land nationalisation, and socialism—the last refuge of a scoundrel who has no concrete beliefs—he was looked upon as a harmless dreamer, who might be amusing, but never dangerous, which gave him the entree to houses, when in reality he was unfit to associate with ordinary pickpockets. Unused to hypocrisy through a life of almost Arcadian simplicity, Miss Horeton became friendly with him. That she should be deceived by such an accomplished hypocrite, even lie to save him, was only the natural result of her own simplicity. The same simplicity and a sense of personal honour has made her try to conceal the real nature of her collusion with the prisoner, which has even carried her to the extreme of defending the honour of a scoundrel, at the sacrifice of her own. Outwardly fit to grace the finest palace ever built by a king, inwardly fit to ennoble, as priestess, the greatest temple ever raised by man in honour of what is great and self-sacrificing, the prisoner has ruthlessly trodden under foot one of the fairest flowers of womanhood; knowing what can be seen by everyone now, that once her esteem and affection were gained, he was safe from any harm from her—even if his plot failed, even though she knew he was guilty of the crime with which he is charged. Gentlemen of the jury, it is for you to decide whether her evidence is based upon truth or—love."

The Crown Prosecutor sat down. Mr. Alston inti-

mated that he did not intend to address the jury, beyond saying there was no evidence to support what the learned gentleman, the counsel for the prosecution, had said.

Judge Trite then summed up the law of the case, and told the jury it rested with them to believe or not Miss Horeton's evidence in explanation of her collusion with the prisoner. If they believed it—and he could not see very well why they should not—they would bring in a verdict accordingly.

The jury held a moment's whispered consultation; then the foreman announced, in a death-like silence—

"We find the prisoner not guilty."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

It was after her totally unforeseen admission at the trial when Kate began to realise that having a very strong wish was not necessarily a step to its gratification. She had had many wishes during her girlhood; but somehow even then they seemed unimportant. She entered lightly into her scheme of getting hold of Jim Smith for her sister, never dreaming of the moral considerations; there was but the end to be gained, and all or any means were sufficient. It was not till her mother had tried wheedling, bribing, and threatening that Kate had got a glimpse of the moral view of the question, and then only because her mother had wheedled.

How right her mother might be Kate alone knew, and even now Jim's confession was rankling in her mind. She had seen his start in the dock, had heard him say "Your honor—your honor," and guessed he had wanted to say her word was untrue. But she knew instinctively that on the question of her own virtue, from a woman in her position, her word would be taken for gospel truth; and she saw by his sudden silence that Jim had realised it, too. In her new humility, she put more meaning into his sudden dejection than it held. It convinced her that he was bitterly ashamed of her, for they were the only persons who knew the truth. Then another regret reached her mind—"What would his friends think of him?" But with it came a pleasanter thought: it might shut him off from the houses which contained perhaps handsomer and more attractive women than herself. She did not know the influence of a large income. Somebody led her from the court-house. When they were at the door she saw it was the stockman. There was a look of such melancholy pity on his face that she did not know whether to laugh or cry. Glancing round, she saw that the crowd of idlers were all staring at her intently, some furtively, some openly. On the face of every woman, ex-

cept half a dozen, there was a cold and reserved disdain. It made Kate tremble. The half-dozen who were different looked at her boldly, with smiles that offered fellowship. One daringly came towards her; the stockman put her roughly aside.

"She is one of us—I want to speak to her." Jack turned on her with a wrathful flush on his face. The woman slunk away.

"Why didn't you let her speak to me?" asked Kate.

"You wouldn't have understood her lingo."

Kate glanced at him wonderingly, and saw that his expression of pity had deepened. Reaching the hotel, she went up to her father's room. The door was locked. She came down again and told Jack. He looked disgusted and angry.

"I'll go up and see if he's there myself, Miss Kate."

When he returned, he was looking more disgusted and angrier.

"You'd better go up again, Miss Kitty; he's there, but I don't think he heard you." She went, with a strange sinking in her heart. Her father opened the door himself. She walked in.

"What do you want here?" he asked, roughly.

"I wish to drive home with you, of course."

"Damn your impudence."

Kate went close up to him.

"What do you mean, father?" She was very white, and spoke very quietly.

"I mean that I dare not drive through this place in daylight alone, much less with you. How can I take a woman like you home to your mother?"

Kate did not answer. She stood thinking for a moment. Then, giving him a glance which he never forgot, she walked out without another word.

At the hotel door she met the stockman again. There were some loungers on the steps; they glanced at her in a way she had never seen men look at her before, and trembled a little. Jack looked round fiercely, but could only meet their looks of droll and significant envy with silent fury.

"Where are we going?" asked Kate.

"I think Mrs. Warren will drive you home; anyway, we'll see."

Mrs. Warren and Mary were about to step into their buggy when they arrived. Mary swung round, picked up her skirt, and moved back a step or two. Mrs. Warren looked at Mary with cold severity; then, seeing Kate's expression of helpless bewilderment, her face softened.

"What is it, Kate?"

"Father has turned me away," she answered simply.

"Can she go home with you, Mrs. Warren?" asked Jack.

"Of course; I think your father is making a mistake."

"I don't," said Mary.

"Go home with him, then," said her mother, in a sudden flash of anger, "and try to mind your own business."

Mary walked away with Jack.

When they had driven a few miles, Mrs. Warren turned to Kate and asked—

"What do you intend doing, Kate?"

"I can't make it all out," replied Kate. "I never thought father and—and Mary would do this."

"They believed what you said in your evidence."

"I wanted the judge and the others to believe it; but I didn't think those who knew me would." Mrs. Warren looked at her with a great pity. "I didn't know that I was going to say it right up till when the question was put. Then—then—I saw it was the only way; that it was the only way they might believe as an explanation. I wanted to get him off so badly."

Mrs. Warren thought of Mary's cold-blooded scheme, and sighed; then looked at Kate almost reverently.

"Were you going home with your father?"

"I think mother will kill me when she hears what I have done. She loved Harry so much, you know. I was going to ask father to put me down at your place; then ask you to let me stay with you for a fortnight, till mother had calmed down a little. I see I can't now," she said brokenly.

"Have you thought of anything else?"

"No; but I see I must."

They were silent awhile.

"Do you think he will forgive me?"

"Who—your father?"

"No; Mr. Smith."

"That depends. If he is a man of honour, and doesn't care for you, he won't, for your evidence made him out to be a blackguard. If he cares for you he will forgive; but may never marry you."

"Do you think he's a blackguard?"

"I did not; do you?"

"I don't know." She was thinking of his confession to her. "I did not do it to get him to marry me. I only wanted to free him, as it was through me that he got into 'rouble."

"You didn't mind the cost to yourself, it seems."

"What cost?"

"You see, it would have been different if it were only a matter of surmise and gossip amongst your friends; but you got up in a public place, and placed it beyond all dispute." Then Kate understood the bold looks of the loungers, and the offer of fellowship from the women outside the court.

For the rest of the drive they were silent. It was not till two in the morning that Mary arrived. She went straight to her mother's room, where Kate heard her speaking angrily. But Kate did not puzzle now—she knew. And knew that she and Mrs. Warren would have to part.

Even then she was not sorry for the price she had paid to save Jim Smith.

## CHAPTER XXX.

The least sound advice Mr. Smith had ever given his son was when he told him to do that which pleased himself, and make his own mistakes in order to learn not to make them. He had completely overlooked the fact that Jim had had no practical experience whatever, and he had given counsel valuable only to a man like himself, such as never needed it. Brought up in the secluded life amongst books, guarded from rough things by paid servants, his head full of the dreamy notions culled from books written by scientists and like dreamers, Jim had eyes just sufficiently opened to see the difference between realities and ideas in life. The good in him led to belief in ideals; his inexperience led him to believe that simply knowing was sufficient to bring ideals into practice. Hence he talked frequently of what men ought to do, to be met with indulgent smiles from men, who knew that men did what they could, and as much as they ought as possible. They had been at the roots of life. Jim had only seen the flowers. But without knowing it, he had inherited a good deal of his father's energy, for which he had had no outlet.

This was the real cause of his superficial cynicism, because he was an ordinary enough man to wish for a fine reason to explain a vice which he mistook for a kind of superiority. But underneath it there was a strain of common sense that had sent him to the bank to learn finance and the management of his estate before he took its direction into his own hands. It was the same strain which protected him from flatterers, and other sharpers and faddists. And he had really been happier in the bank than he had been for many a day. There he had felt much less like the fifth wheel in the buggy than had been his wont. It was this touch of self-satisfaction that had given him a keener interest in the small things of life around him, and in women. He would even have fallen in love with Mary Warren if Kate Horeton had not ap-

pealed to the better side of his nature by her apparent simplicity, and demonstrated her innocence—he knew it was that now—by her extraordinary self-confidence. Unfortunately for him, the simplest character takes on all appearance of complicated cunning when not understood by a shallow cynic. If he had not thought he knew so much, he would quickly have seen that Kate knew infinitely less, and he might have kissed her on the spot when she proposed her ridiculous bargain, and have offered to marry her before she could have finished the exposure of her ignorance, instead of treating it as a more cunning attack than usual on his cash. Cynicism is lacking in humour, as well as proportion.

Like Kate, he had scarcely noticed the proceedings of the court after her fatal evidence; but the result gave him a decisiveness that was entirely new. He had never boasted that he understood women, or had had enough intimacy with them for him to ever meet the question; but he was the only man in the court who really understood how much Kate had done in damning her reputation for him.

It swept all the cobwebs out of his brain, and revealed him to himself in his true light—and her—and he knew by reason of his better education that in trying to meet her on her own ground with a counter scheme—though it was more successful than her's—that he had been something infinitely worse than a fool, and had saddled himself with a regret that would last the rest of his life, and that its success was more bitter than the worst of failures could have been.

It was in no amiable temper that he left the court, nor was his temper improved by his reception from the more indecent part of the onlookers. Getting clear of them, he noted that he was followed by someone, which did not trouble him till he was seated in the train; then he saw it was Solomon, his fellow clerk.

Solomon's face was stern, his thick lips drawn into a set line of purpose, and his black eyes sparkled fiercely. There were several other passengers in the compartment, who quickly saw there was what they termed "fun" on. Being ignorant of the cause did not detract from their prospective enjoyment. Jim hated a scene,

and tried to read a newspaper. Solomon glared at him so fiercely that an impatient passenger remarked there was something more useful at the end of his arms for damaging a man than fiery eyes. Solomon deliberately took the paper out of Jim's hand.

"You cur," he said. Jim's eyes shone dully with self-restraint, though a kind of elation began to take possession of him. There were no complications in this issue.

"Not here, Solomon—at Boorana."

"Now," said Solomon, rising.

"Their name has been dragged in the mud quite enough already; don't sully it more by public brawling."

Solomon sat down suddenly.

"At Boorana, then," he said, quietly. The passengers were quite disappointed.

"Funking it?" queried one. "Who's the girl?" It was a chance shot. Solomon rose and hit him on the jaw.

At Boorana Jim stepped out first.

"Meet me at the bridge in half an hour. If we go together, we're sure to be followed." Solomon nodded.

"I suppose you know it is because of Miss Helen that I am going to thrash you," said Solomon, when they met at the bridge.

"Thank goodness," said Jim, with apparent relief, "I thought perhaps you were in love with Miss Kate, too."

Solomon looked surprised.

"In love with her, too. What do you mean?"

"Well, you're such a good-looking Jew that I might have had no show against you."

"No show?" exclaimed Solomon, ignoring the sarcasm.

"What!" shouted Jim. "Do you mean to say you believed what she said in the witness box? Why, man, you're crazy."

"Why the—— What the——"

"Don't you see, you fool, she didn't want me hanged, and had to get me out of it somehow?"

"Good Lord!" gasped Solomon.

"Now, Solomon, you've been good enough to think the woman I want to marry is—is—well, you know; and I'm going to teach you a better opinion of her, and me at the same time,"

He forthwith proceeded to thrash Solomon, and succeeded at the end of three-quarters of an hour. But Solomon fought like a Maccabee, and when he gave in, they helped each other to the hotel—Jim to lay up for three days, Solomon for a week. At the end of the three days Jim began a letter to Kate, which he had intended writing as soon as the trial was over. In the beginning of it he met with difficulties, and chewed the end of his pen to splinters in trying to decide whether he should begin with "My Dear Miss Horeton," "Dear Kate," or something more endearing. Then compromised by—

"My Dear Miss Kate." Then stared vacantly at the opposite wall. There was nothing lover-like in his appearance, for his face was swollen and puffy, while his left eye gleamed from a big yellow patch that had been black, and his hand was shaking. "I would have written sooner," he began; "but a difference of opinion between me and Solomon." He rose and limped about the room for ten minutes. Then, tearing up the paper, he started again—

"My Dearest Catherine,—The terrible anxiety of my trial." He dashed the pen on the table, muttered a curse, and stared at the wall again. Then, taking out a fresh sheet of paper, he set his teeth, and wrote, without waiting to weigh his words—

"My Darling Kate,—Will you marry me? I'd have written sooner, but had to thrash Solomon, which also knocked me up for three days. My confession to you was a lie. Harry's death was an accident. It was my intention to ask you to be my wife the very day Harry and I had our fatal quarrel; that, of course, deferred any such matter. Then came your extraordinary proposition, which at once convinced me that you had no real regard for me. I also believed that you did not think I intentionally caused Harry's death, or would not have stipulated that I should marry your sister. I refused your proposal because I wanted you, and you only; and my bitterness at the time was from thinking you could not care for me. I only made up my confession to save myself from being compelled to marry your sister. Can and will you forgive my blind stupidity. No matter what

happens, I am burdened with a regret that will stay with me to the grave; and you with an undeserved stigma, from a sacrifice which I alone can appreciate at its fullest value. I shall wait here a week for your answer. Write, or, better still, come at once, and I shall take you to my aunt, and marry you from my own house.—Yours for ever, JAMES SMITH."

Jim read the letter through again, his face puckering with disgust at its clumsiness; but, not being able to think of anything more to say, he desperately folded and sealed it; then went to the post-office before he could make up his mind to go back and rewrite it, hoping sincerity would compensate for its clumsiness.

He waited a day, two days, a week; but got no answer. Then rumor had it that Kate was seen leaving Boorana by a midnight train. Then he found the trammels of his old cynicism were not so easily thrown off as he thought. In spite of himself, the idea that it was his threat of exposing her plot to capture him for her sister, not affection for him, began to obtrude itself as an explanation of her evidence to save him; and that her evidence was, after all, only to save Nell from him. And he discovered the idea of her indifference to him hurt him most now. He went out to see Mrs. Warren. Her manner of receiving him was suspicious; he grew distant and cold, and she curt. He learnt Kate had gone a few days before, but not that she had gone from Mrs. Warren's house; so Jim took it for granted she had been to her own, got his letter, and left there. He turned and sadly rode away. Mrs. Warren watched him with a mixture of disappointment and contempt; she had expected he would ride out and consult her the day after the trial at the very latest. She had heard no rumour of his sickness, only that he was in his room moping. Solomon had, very naturally, held his tongue about getting a thrashing from Smith.

Mary saw Jim as he was riding away, and frowned that she had not seen him riding in.

"What did Mr. Smith want, mother?"

"He came to ask for Kate."

"What did you tell him?"

"That she had gone away."

"Did you say where?"

"No"—Mary's face brightened—"he did not ask."

Mary smiled.

"You should have asked him in, mother."

Mrs. Warren did not reply, while her expression told Mary nothing, which was fortunate for Mary.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

When Mr. Horeton left Kate in Beechworth, the idea of being jeered at by strangers left him. When he dropped Mary Warren at her gate, his outward appearance changed, and he drove the rest of the way with his body stooping agedly. Arriving home, he went direct to his wife's room.

Nell heard him come, and waited impatiently for Kate to follow. At last she went out to see what was keeping her, and only saw Jack unharnessing the horses.

"Where's Kate?" she asked.

"She came back with Mrs. Warren."

"Why didn't she come with you?"

"The boss wouldn't let her."

"What's wrong? How did the trial go?"

"Smith was acquitted."

"I knew he was innocent; but why didn't father let Kate come home with him?"

"'Cause she got Smith off." Jack became excessively busy. Nell saw he did not want to be questioned.

"How did Kate get him off?" she persisted.

"Just told things—that's ter say, she just said as how it all happened."

"Why did that anger father?"

"It didn't—leastways, she put it in a fashion yer father didn't like." Jack was somewhat flustered.

"What's the matter, Jack? Tell me."

"Fact is," he said, scratching his head, thoughtfully, "she had ter say things what did her no good, or didn't seem to. I dunno exactly how it was—but I think she's a brick."

"You do know, Jack; now tell me," said Nell, angrily.

"Dammit, ask your father. I can't; what's more, I won't."

Nell went inside instantly. Her father was still talking to her mother; she knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" called out her father.

"It's I, Nell."

"What do you want?"

"Where's Kate?"

"At Mrs. Warren's. Now go to bed; we're busy."

"When is Kate coming home again?"

"Come inside," Nell stepped in. "What's Jack been telling you?"

"He wouldn't tell me anything," said Nell, observing her father's shame and anger-drawn face.

"Your sister may be home in the morning; now go to bed and wait." He followed her to the door. "In the meantime, mind your own business, girl."

Mrs. Horeton had turned away her face when Nell entered; she looked round at her husband again as soon as Nell was gone. Her eyes had the old fiery gleam in them—there was a suggestion of insanity in their brilliancy. She had been telling her husband of her interview with Kate the previous evening.

"You ought have told me all this before, wife; but I always left the management of the children in your hands. I might have arranged with the lawyer that this terrible disgrace would never have happened in public. Curse the girl! She'll never enter the house again."

"She'll have to come back. What can she do else?"

"You've trained her well. She can take a job as domestic servant somewhere. I'll never be able to hold my head up in the district again."

"Rubbish, man. Many a girl has gone wrong before. The disgrace is hers, not ours. Nothing came out about what you dreaded?"

"No," he answered. "But I don't know but that I wouldn't have preferred it to this. My daughter, and in a public place." He groaned. "She acquitted him at our expense." Mrs. Horeton stirred restlessly.

"She defied me. Harry! Harry! to think you have such a sister!" she wailed suddenly. Then dropped as suddenly back to her business-like tone—

"Was there no chance of proving him guilty?"

"If it had been on the evidence of what she saw only, he would have been acquitted. But she had to explain why she went into the township. There was an appear-

ance of conspiracy; she explained it as I've told you. Do you think that she thought him guilty?"

"I'm certain of it, or she wouldn't have blazed up as she did. She will come back—she will expect that—that—man to come for her. He'll come, too——"

"Then I'll kill him myself," blurted her husband. "They'd never hang me for it," he added, with a touch of his old caution, which always followed a fit of passion. His wife knew the caution would outweigh the passion by the morning.

"You must let her come back; I must see her myself."

Her tone attracted his attention. He saw her fierce face set in a witch-like expression, from which the desire for revenge had driven every other feeling. Adoration for her son had been transformed into an absorbing hate for her daughter. He shuddered, and felt gradually her old mastery in everything concerning the children. He suddenly felt old and tired.

"I'll let her come, but be as gentle with her as you can," he said, weakly, and went to bed.

Nell observed them closely for the next two days. Her father resumed the listless way of automatically looking after the property, including what he had acquired by Harry's death. Mrs. Horeton took up her knitting, and her seat on the verandah, where she sat working with a set face and fiery eyes; the only change in her was that the gleam in her eyes was more intense. Nell worked about the house scarcely noticed; but if she happened to come on the verandah unexpectedly, she saw her mother's flame-lit glance light on her; then fade disappointedly on to her work again. Frequently Nell saw her staring across the paddocks towards Mrs. Warren's, then resume her knitting energetically, as though she knew she would not be disappointed in the end. On the evening of the fourth day Jack handed Nell a letter. It was addressed to Kate. Nell went to her mother.

"When do you expect Kate, mother?"

"To-day—any time."

"Here's a letter for her."

"Who's it from?"

"The Welstroms, I think; she was expecting one from them."

"Put it in her room."

Nell put it on its edge on the mantelpiece, so that Kate would see it the moment she entered the room. Jack shortly after passed Mrs. Horeton.

"Do you know if Mr. Smith is in the township?"

"Yes, mum; but he's not working in the bank."

"That will do," said Mrs. Horeton.

In spite of the servant, Nell did twice her work. After tea, it having been a hot day, she was tired and went to bed. She was falling asleep when her mother peeped in and awakened her; then Nell heard her go towards Kate's room and fell asleep again.

Kate's door was wide open, and Mrs. Horeton saw the gleam of the white envelope on the mantelpiece. She entered and took it in her hand, seeing at once it was not from the Welstroms. She knew their writing fairly well, and instantly guessed it must be from Smith. Tearing it open, she was thinking he must know Kate was to be home that night, and had sent the letter to meet her. Mrs. Horeton read it through slowly, with a whitening, maddening face; then she read it again, the words burning and searing themselves into her brain, till they all jumbled into one—Confession. Then Kate had known him to be a murderer, and in spite of it had ruined herself, disgraced her family, disgraced Harry's name, to acquit him—and must still think him a murderer. Mrs. Horeton glanced round the room piteously, looked through the window up to heaven, as if asking God why He had let a self-confessed murderer out of His hands; seeing nothing, but that even He might have helped her to punish a murderer, when it was the only wish remaining to her on earth. Her face changed slowly from despair to fury, the concentrated fury of the monomaniac. She walked round the room three times quickly, with the open letter in one hand, often pressing the other to her forehead in an effort to think; but the words "She believed—she believed," buzzed insistently through her brain. In her last turn she caught sight of the poker in the fireplace. She stooped and picked it up; then, sitting on the bed, concealed it in the folds of her thin dressing-gown, and

stared at the door fixedly, two ideas humming through her brain like an endless whirr of wheels—"She'll come to-night; she'll come to-night. She believed—she believed."

Horeton did not sleep in his wife's room that night, but in a spare room he used to avoid disturbing her when he came home late.

Towards daybreak Nell awoke with a shiver. The still summer night had turned chilly. Pulling more bed-clothes over herself, she fell asleep again. She was awakened apparently a moment after by a clatter of falling iron on a wooden floor next hers. She started up fearfully, and heard a low muttering coming from the direction of Kate's room. The weird light of the dawn was creeping through the window. She rose and went trembling to Kate's room, and nearly screamed when she saw what she took for Kate's ghost sitting upright on the bed, muttering. She ran to her father.

"Father! father! there's something in Kate's room." He jumped up instantly.

"Good God!" he gasped when he saw his wife. She was shivering violently, having been in the draught between the door and window the whole night, in the thinnest of clothing. He took her gently in his arms, and carried her to bed.

Nell went out and awakened Jack, and sent him galloping away. Boorana, for the second time, was startled by a horseman galloping furiously for the doctor in the night.

By sunrise it was known that Mrs. Horeton was a lunatic.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Kate did not see Mary during the five days she was under the same roof, nor did she try. Mrs. Warren wished to tell Mary everything, but Kate said it would seem like begging Mary's good opinion on a story she would probably disbelieve; so Kate would not hear of it, and bound her friend on no account to reveal what she knew. When Mrs. Warren asked if she would like to go home, she smiled rather wanly, and told Mrs. Warren of her mother's remarks on the night before the trial. Then Mrs. Warren suggested writing to Smith; but found Kate obdurate again.

"I have given him quite a bad enough opinion of me to risk a worse, and I have no reason to believe he has any deeper feeling for me than for a mere acquaintance. If he has, he'll come unprompted."

She had no hope Smith would write or call, or he would have done one or the other sooner.

Kate heard no news from home; no rumour of her mother's state had reached her, mainly because people knew it concerned Kate that they were silent in the presence of the Warrens.

Then Kate crept away in the night, leaving a note of explanation for Mrs. Warren, who sighed sadly when she read it next morning. Then went into Mary, and rated her for a fool.

It was 12 p.m. when Kate boarded the train at Boorana. She was heavily veiled; the stationmaster did not appear curious, or betray that he knew her. She had not the faintest idea of what she would do on reaching Melbourne. She was moved by an irresistible desire to hide from her friends and family, and had a vague idea that a situation as a servant in the city would hide her from the coldly meaning looks of the men and women who knew her story.

It became hot when the sun rose. Kate took off her

veil and jacket to get cooler. The train began to fill with passengers, and her beautiful face, with its expression of now patient suffering, brought her little attentions from them, which unconsciously lessened in her the feeling of humiliation. Most were from impersonal young men.

At last one of them grew particularly attentive.

Kate did not like his face, but he was persistent. When half way, he had the monopoly of serving her. He was a knowing young man of the world, who, therefore, did not betray that he was very puzzled; for he was not sure whether she was unusually knowing or remarkably green. He pumped her, with very little satisfaction. He learnt she was bound for service in Melbourne; but the quality of her clothes made him incredulous.

"She's a deep 'un," he thought, and became more friendly. He was very kind. Kate was grateful, became less reserved, and told him she wished for a very quiet place.

"I shall introduce you to my aunt," he said.

Kate glanced at him in surprise.

"I don't know your name, and I don't know that I would like your aunt."

The young man's eyes narrowed. "And you're not going to know my name, young lady," he said to himself; and to Kate—

"She's an amiable old lady. I've introduced young ladies to her before. She was always pleased to see them."

"She must be very kind to you. I suppose you're a good nephew." The good nephew lowered his eyelids.

"Oh, yes; we're very fond of each other. She'll do anything for me, and lives in a very quiet suburb."

"Does she want a servant? I'm very good at housework."

"Well, I don't know; but I want to introduce you to her as my friend."

"Why do you wish to do that; it would be deceiving your kind aunt. For you never met me before, and don't even know my name."

"You could easily rectify that." It was on the tip of her tongue, when she saw the young man watching her keenly. She remained silent. He thought he quite un-

derstood her now. She was very knowing. They began to talk generally. He thought it safer. When they reached the city, he took possession of her bag, and, seeing that it was not such as girls in search of situations usually carried, he winked at it solemnly. But he got on to a tram with her, which he stopped opposite a palatial building in a very wide street.

"We're going in here," he announced. Kate looked at the building in awe. She would have sought a much less pretentious-looking place.

"It's a coffee palace," he explained.

"A palace; won't it cost too much?"

"It's cheaper than a hotel." He went in and booked a room. Turning to her casually, he asked—

"What name shall I enter you under?"

"Miss—Miss Thornley," she said.

He led her to a lift, and they shot up half a dozen stories. He put her bag into the room; then turned and asked—

"Have you got a character?" She flushed indignantly, then turned white. "I mean a reference. You can't get a place unless you can get some person to vouch for your respectability." Kate remembered letters servants had brought to Mrs. Warren; she turned to the young man.

"I wonder if I'm doing right?" she asked, almost piteously.

"She's darned clever," thought the young man; "you'd better write to your friends—if you have any," he added, meaningly.

"I haven't any," she said, sadly. Her face suddenly brightened. "Oh, yes; I have one. I'll write to her. Thank you for the suggestion. I'll do it now." She turned to her bag.

"I say——" began the young man. Kate turned round again.

"I'm so sorry—I nearly forgot. Thank you so much for your goodness."

She held out her hand. He looked at it doubtfully; then took it hesitatingly. She turned to her bag again. There was no mistake about his dismissal. He walked out slowly, saying more slowly to himself—

"By gum! I'm a green 'un; and by gum! she's a beauty." The last remark meant a great deal more than its literal meaning.

Kate got a reply from Mrs. Warren, enclosing a lette. from the matron of the Bloopil Hospital, asking her to call at her earliest convenience.

Kate put on her hat at once and went out. A hanson drove up to the door of the coffee palace at the same moment. "'Ansom, miss?" She thought the driver was trying to be rude; then it struck her that must be the name of the funny-looking cart he was driving. Its doors opened invitingly. She entered, and was startled by seeing the driver's face at a square opening in the roof.

"Where to, miss?"

"The hospital," she said.

"There are six of 'em—which?" he asked, sarcastically. The doors closed in on her before she had finished the name, and they were off. She paid him 5s. He looked as if he wanted to ask for more.

"Shall I wait, miss?"

"Oh, no, thank you. Your horse looks tired. I expect you want to take him home and feed him. Goodbye."

Cabby tried to make up his mind whether he ought to be angry or laugh. She left him scratching his head in search of a decision.

The matron was passing the door as Kate entered.

"Well, miss?" she asked, coldly, marvelling at Kate's beauty.

"I'm Miss Horeton, and wish to see the matron."

"Come with me." Kate followed to a room off the entrance.

"I'm the matron," she said, and, picking out Mrs. Warren's letter, she read it through again. "Have you any idea of the duties of a nurse?" she asked, when she finished reading.

"No."

"Can you work?"

"Rather," said Kate, smiling indulgently. The matron looked her up and down critically.

"You look passably strong and healthy. Have you any complaint?"

"I complain of nothing," said Kate, modestly and seriously.

"I mean have you any sickness or constitutional weakness?" said the matron, with some asperity.

"I've never been sick in my life."

"Who's your doctor?"

"I never had one," said Kate, innocently.

"Didn't a doctor ever attend your family?"

"Only once that I can remember; but he was my brother's," said Kate, sadly.

"You'll have to get a certificate from him, recommending you as fit for the duty. Come the day after to-morrow, and if it is favourable you can take up your duty at once."

In the time stipulated Kate turned up.

"The certificate's all right, ma'am," said Kate, handing it to the matron, and putting down her bag.

"Is it?" remarked the matron, looking at her coolly, then reading it.

"This will do, Miss Horeton; your salary will be £20 a year and quarters."

"What a lot," said Kate, gratefully. The matron was pacified when she saw Kate was not equal to irony.

"Come with me, and I shall show you your room."

Kate hesitated; the matron waited.

"Can I ask you a favour?" asked Kate.

"Certainly; whether I grant it is another matter."

"I want you to tell Mrs. Warren that I could not get this situation."

The matron looked at Kate keenly.

"It's not my business to lie for my nurses; you'd better tell her yourself. You have some reason to hide your identity?"

Mrs. Warren had given the matron an elided account of Kate's motives in going to town.

"A very strong one," answered Kate.

"Well, it's not my affair. All I care about is that you do your work thoroughly. Tell Mrs. Warren yourself, and I shall reply merely that you wished to hide your identity."

"And I wish to change my name to Thornley," said Kate.

"Very well."

When Mrs. Warren wrote to the hospital two days after, to tell Kate of her mother's break down, Kate saw the letter in the rack, and ignored it. In a month it was returned through the Dead Letter office, and from that date Kate's whereabouts was a secret to her friends for many a day.

The day after her departure from the coffee palace, the kind nephew began to haunt it, in the hope of solving a feminine problem, and in a week discovered that the problem and its solution had disappeared together. Kate had the problem of her work, and the people in the hospital to puzzle over. What scrubbing floors had to do with nursing was at first beyond her understanding, but the severe discipline of her early training came to her aid, so she scrubbed and cleaned thoroughly and patiently, never left soap in the water, was never tired, and, if not particularly cheerful, she never moped, and gradually began to take a pleasure in earning the terse approval of the matron. When she was promoted to casual attendance on the patients, her sensibility was fearfully shocked in being set to wash an unspeakably dirty nigger, who had been picked up senseless from the rubbish heap of a low public house in the vilest part of the city. But she scrubbed and cleaned him with the same thoroughness as the walls and floors. At the same time her point of view of life was altering insensibly. She began to think considerably less of herself, and a great deal more of others. It gave her no pleasure at first, being a matter of automatic compulsion and duty, but the daily pain and misery round her began to awaken her sympathy; while the wan wretchedness in the puny city children's faces stirred the instinctive maternal feeling of her sex. She first became cheerful for their sake, and, seeing that it had a brightening effect upon all the patients capable of seeing it, she soon became the most cheerful nurse in the hospital, which was partly because she had entered it with no romantic illusions—and the most sympathetic; while the matron congratulated herself every day on her insight.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

The more Jim thought about his letter to Kate the less he liked it, and he wished he had gone to see Mrs. Warren sooner. Her coldness hurt him. He put it down to a belief in Kate's evidence—and if she would believe him capable of such conduct, who wouldn't? He started packing as soon as he reached his hotel. It was too late to catch the evening train; but he could board the 2 a.m., and get to Melbourne by two the next afternoon, only wishing now that his journey was 80 instead of 180 miles. His last bag was strapped when Mr. Grant opened the door. When he saw the preparations for departure, his eyes opened.

"Going?" he asked.

"As soon as I can," answered Jim. It was the first time he had seen the manager since the trial.

"I came to ask you when you would resume work," said Grant.

"Damn work," said Jim, rudely and irreverently.

Grant was shocked.

"I've had a hard time with Solomon sick, and you away," he said, plaintively. "My cows have been neglected fearfully."

"Unfortunate brutes," said Jim.

"Do you know, I think they had begun to like you immensely, Smith."

"They are the most intelligent animals in the place," said Jim.

Grant was innocent of all irony; he brightened.

"There now, I knew you understood animals, and I always said my cows were clever; you're the only one who has ever agreed with me." Jim's face stiffened. "The horses, too, look how they followed you about; they used to try and kick Solomon every time he went near them."

"I wonder why?" asked Jim, as ingenuously as he could. Solomon had told him why.

"I really don't know. He used to feed them when he first came; but they took a great dislike to him somehow, so I had to apply for an additional clerk."

"Or groom," asked Jim.

"I don't like grooms; they're too independent, and hate figures—that is, when they know anything about them. I've only kept Solomon because he amuses the children, and is patient with them."

Jim remembered Solomon putting the elder boy out of the banking chamber by the scruff of his neck for playing with the bank revolver. Mr. Grant was away that day; when he was at home they baited the Jew with crude historical references.

"I have no intention of returning to the bank, for I'm leaving by the first train in the morning," said Jim.

"Have you sent in your resignation?"

"No."

"Look here, Smith, you're a good clerk. I'll recommend you for a rise if you'll stay on." Grant apparently disbelieved in the statements of Jim being wealthy. Jim grinned. "For I don't think those young turkeys will be properly looked after if you go." Jim laughed.

"Do you want me to remain as bank clerk or turkey raiser?"

"As clerk, of course; turkeys take up very little time, you know."

"I'll ask Mr. Evans about it when I see him in town."

"About what?"

"Raising my salary to grow turkeys," said Jim maliciously. Grant looked very like his own turkey cock when it was flustered.

"Look here, Smith, you won't be able to resign unless you send in a formal resignation. Say nothing to Evans, and I'll let you go on my own responsibility, with your salary paid to the end of last week, and I'll put things right for you for leaving without formal notice."

"Thanks," said Jim; "it's a bargain."

But Grant was still flustered when he got home, and grew angry with Smith, as he vaguely wondered what was to become of his farmyard. In his letter to the head office, he hinted it was necessary, in the interests of the moral reputation of the bank's servants, that Smith's

resignation should be accepted, as it saved the need for dismissal, with, perhaps, compensation; for there was nothing in his work to complain of. The letter was handed to Evans, who had also seen the report of Jim's trial in the papers. Evans was quite aware of Grant's peculiarities, and saw there was something besides Jim's moral character at the back of the letter. But he was sorry for Jim, and, being a man of the world, he saw Smith's cynicism was only a thin veil covering the inexperience of youth, which recent events were likely to modify; then dismissed him from his mind, with the wish that he would some day find his feet and walk straight.

When Jim arrived in Melbourne he found that getting no answer to his letter had thrown him into a turmoil of doubt, through which he was conscious most of humiliation. It looked very much like silent contempt, and he was really so much in love with Kate that he was in a condition to be sensitive. To work off part of his irritation, he called on Mr. Alston, and told him that he regarded him as a clumsy bungler for getting him off at such a cost to a woman. Alston was hurt.

"You made no condition as to how I should do it—particularly as you regarded her as hostile."

"Do you think she was hostile, getting me off like that?"

"She was hostile enough to get you into the mess, anyway, and I don't think it was very friendly to paint you as a peculiarly mean kind of blackguard."

"Do you mean to say you believed what she said to be true?"

"That has nothing to do with me. My business was to get you off, and I think I did it very well. Besides, you know that sort of thing doesn't affect a man much; she's the real sufferer, not you."

"And still you think she's hostile?"

"No; but a peculiarly devilish kind of saint." Alston was becoming nettled. "She couldn't have had much reputation to lose, when she could stand up as she did, and publicly damn herself."

"You leave her reputation alone; it's my affair——"

"So it seems."

Jim wrote out Alston's cheque, and left before he lost his temper altogether. But a bitter self-contempt rose in him when he thought Alston might be right.

His aunt was waiting at the door for him. She kissed him silently; looking closely into his face, and saw that all traces of the boy had left it. The lines round his mouth had deepened and hardened, though his eyes still gazed into hers with their old affection. And she saw there was some inward battle fighting itself out within him. She did not seek his confidence. It was unnecessary. After dinner they took their old seats on the verandah, his aunt with her accustomed sewing.

Then Jim told her everything, except his asking Kate to marry him. As she listened, the work fell from her hands, and when he finished they were both silent for awhile.

"Can you tell me, mum, whether she's saint or devil? Whatever she is, I'll love her till I'm dead."

His aunt was silent for a long time.

"She's a woman, Jim"—he moved impatiently—"it means she's a bit of both. I don't understand her. I don't think she understands herself. We never do, nor do we understand each other. I wish, for your sake, I could say something definite, even hopeful."

"Her self-damning evidence, mum——"

"Until we know all her motives, that may be as much devil as saint."

"I can only see the motive of saving me."

"And make you out a callous brute, too."

"But that was untrue." His aunt looked at him earnestly.

"Who knows that but you and she. How much do you think your friends will believe? Don't you think she ought or has thought of that? Can't you see how it binds you to her—in a way, cutting you off from girls worth having? Do you think there's one honourable father or mother who would willingly have you enter their house now?"

"Yes," said Jim, cynically.

"And all the time you would be thinking it was your money, not yourself, that got you admission. Do you

remember what you said when I wished to get you married and settled? Is the opinion of honourable men and women worth nothing to you now—and what of their opinion of the woman you loved?" That touched him on the raw.

"That's half the trouble; I'm one of a gregarious species, to whom outside decent opinion is nearly as valuable as my own. I wish I knew what she was; it would only be a matter of time for others to know, too. But even if I were certain she was bad, I don't think I could now help caring for her."

"Would you marry her then, Jim?" He passed the question over.

"But she is grand, mum. I only wish you could see her; she's——"

He went into a glowing description of her beauty, and in it forgot all his doubts, till his aunt realised that it was her beauty more than her character and qualities he loved; and she grew more hopeful. Then she remembered he had scarcely spoken to her more than half a dozen times, and that Kate, consequently, knew as little of his character as he of hers. It then flashed across her mind that Kate must be an adventuress. Her face saddened for her nephew's sake. When Jim finished, he looked at his aunt with glowing eyes, expectantly.

"I think she's mostly devil, Jim," she said, quietly, and took up her sewing again. The light faded out of Jim's face. He sat gazing at and seeing nothing of the horizon, ineffectively trying to light a cigar. His aunt sewed on without another word. It was a beautifully warm evening, with a soft southerly breeze just stirring the leaves of the trees, bringing to them a heavy scent of roses, and the fresh smell of watered mould. After the dry odour of the eucalyptus-laden air north of the Divide, the smell of damp earth was refreshing. He was only vaguely conscious of it; even though it occasionally distracted his thoughts, they inveterately returned to his desire for Kate; but to each favouring thought came his aunt's words—

"She's mostly devil, Jim."

At last he sighed and threw his cigar away as he rose

and stretched himself languidly, with a languidness which his aunt saw was feigned.

"Mum, I'm going to work; the harder the better."

She knew, then, her words had won. She rose, too, and kissed him.

For years after the smell of fresh-watered mould and the scent of roses made them sad.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Except in his attention to his wife, Mrs. Horeton's breakdown into insanity seemed to sap the last bit of energy out of her husband. Luckily for the property, Jack, the stockman, rose to the occasion. Sometimes he would get Nell to ask the "boss" some detail; but that became rarer and rarer.

Jack and Nell were a council of two, which managed the property together.

Mrs. Horeton spent the first week of her malady in walking up and down the room, with the regularity of movement and gesture of a caged leopard. From hearth to window, stopping for a moment with an upward movement of her head to gaze intently at the paddocks, then silently turning and walking swiftly back to the hearth, with the long, stealthy tread of an animal. Her hair had gone quite white, her face was rigid, while her deep-set eyes glowed sullenly. At night she curled herself up on the bed and slept heavily. The doctor came out every day to see her, and sat for an hour each time, watching her closely. At the end of a week, he told Horeton to watch her with more care, as there would be a change. Her husband carried a camp bed into the room, and slept near her.

About daybreak he awakened and missed her steady breathing. Jumping up in fear, he heard her in Harry's room. He found her kneeling on the floor in front of an open box, with all Harry's baby clothes on her lap, patting and folding them neatly, and crooning a baby song. She answered rationally when he spoke, and quietly put them away at his request; then she walked quietly back to her room, got into bed again, and instantly fell into a deep sleep. For another week she steadily went through the same performance. It awakened Nell one morning, who went in, too, when she saw her father enter. Her mother looked up at her with contracting eyebrows, and began to put the baby clothes quickly away, watching

Nell furtively, as if she expected her to make some attack upon them. Shutting the box gently, she rose suddenly; then, striding to the fireplace, she picked up the poker.

"Leave the room quickly, Nell," said her father. Nell was gone when her mother looked round: a momentary gleam of puzzled wonder flitted across her face. Then she glanced stupidly at the poker in her hand. Horeton took it from her, and, replacing it in the hearth, led her back to bed. She resumed walking the room during the day. One afternoon her husband left the door half open. Nell went past just as her mother turned to walk to the window, and, seeing Nell, stopped stock still, a frown of deep thought slipping into her face. Nell passed on unconscious. Her mother crept after her stealthily. Nell went into Harry's room to open the window and tidy it; when she looked round she saw her mother crouching in the doorway glaring at her. Mrs. Horeton crept towards the fireplace, still glaring at Nell.

"Father!" she shrieked.

He ran in, and, taking in the situation at a glance, he ran and threw the fireirons out of the window. Mrs. Horeton stooped and felt for them, still glaring at Nell; then fell on her knees and began groping. Nell slipped out. A bewildered look spread over Mrs. Horeton's face; then she began to cry, gently at first, then violently. The doctor arrived; Mr. Horeton explained to him what had happened. The doctor went to the box containing Harry's clothes, and ostentationsly rattled the lid in opening it. Mrs. Horeton sprang to it with a low scream, and began taking out the clothes, crooning a baby song again. The doctor next day brought a large doll. Mrs. Horeton took it with a happy smile, went straight to Harry's room, and began dressing it in his baby clothes. It kept her occupied for a fortnight.

The servant Mrs. Horeton had employed before her madness was a bush girl of about seventeen, who walked barefooted about the house, unless visitors came. Kate's room had not been cleaned since Mrs. Horeton was carried shivering out of it. In search of work—there was very little now that the house had been so much reduced—the servant peeped into it, and, seeing a paper lying on the floor under the bed, determined to clean up. Collecting her brooms and pan, she swept the room, and the

dust on to the pan, including Jim's letter; then emptied her pan into the dust-box outside. When she returned, she clattered the fireirons in putting them into their place. Mrs. Horeton heard the familiar noise and started. Quietly rising and opening her door, she went swiftly to Kate's room, and, seeing the girl kneeling at the hearth, she leapt on to her back and grasped her hair. The girl uttered shriek after shriek. Mr. Horeton and Nell ran in, and were only able to rescue her by cutting off her hair in Mrs. Horeton's hands.

She quietened then, and went back to her room, where they gave her the doll. But her eyes were brighter and more restless. Whenever she heard a step passing her door now, she stopped her walk to listen. If it was a man's she resumed her pacing; if the rustle of clothing indicated a woman's, her face worked savagely, and she remained listening till it was out of hearing.

"She's developing homicidal mania," said the doctor; "and will have to go to an asylum." Horeton bowed his head sadly.

"If she doesn't, I won't be answerable for the consequences. It will be better for her and you, and the sooner she goes the better."

They took her away a week afterwards. The day after her departure Mrs. Warren received her letter to Kate back through the dead letter office. She told Mary Kate had disappeared. Then Mary determined to call on Nell, and make enquiries about Mrs. Horeton's health, and learn incidentally if Nell knew where Kate was. She had a theory of her own.

When she started, a fierce north wind was roaring in the gum trees, breaking weak branches, and driving leaves before it in wide swirls. It moaned round Horeton's house, swept with a wail over the rubbish-box, and scattered its contents about the yard in impotent fury; then sent a whirlwind on to them, which swept the papers round the yard in eddies, one eddy picking up Jim's letter, whirling, twisting and turning over the roof of the stable with a lot of other papers, and flattened it against the gate-post of the stable yard just as Mary rode up. Dismounting to open the gate, the letter fell away from

the post at her feet, and, seeing the first words, she recognised the writing instantly. Quickly stooping, she picked the letter up and put it in her pocket.

Mary was shocked at the change in Nell. She was worn almost to skin and bone, while her eyes shone with a nervous fear. In her loneliness Nell opened her mind to Mary, who learnt that Nell knew nothing of Kate's whereabouts, and had expected to hear from Mary that her mother knew. Mary could only tell her about the returned letter. Nell's face fell.

"Didn't she come home before she went away?" asked Mary.

"No," said Nell. Then, suddenly remembered the letter for Kate. "And a letter came for her. I'll see if it's still there." She went to Kate's room.

"It's gone," she said when she returned. "I wonder who can have taken it?"

"Can your servant read?"

"No, and she isn't curious, anyway." She didn't look it.

"Have you any idea who it was from?"

"It looked like the Welstroms' writing, and she was expecting a letter from them."

"Perhaps she came back without your knowing, and took it," suggested Mary. "She left our place in the middle of the night."

"She'd have at least come to me," said Nell.

"Not, perhaps, if she were going away with Mr. Smith," said Mary.

A mixture of pride and anger came into Nell's face.

"Mr. Smith left after she did, and Kate is an honest woman," said Nell, her face flushing.

"You were not at the trial, so don't know how she got him off."

Nell was about to ask Mary what Kate had said, when she thought of Jack's flustered manner, and her father's shamed anger. She changed the subject to the state of her mother's health, telling Mary how grief had broken her mother down mentally. The change was so obvious that Mary jumped to the conclusion Nell knew all about Kate's evidence; also that Nell had guessed Kate had gone away with Smith. Mary resolved to call on Mrs. Grant. When half a mile away, she read Jim's let-

ter through—read it with a whitening and unhappy face. It convinced her that Kate had been home, read the letter, had probably been disturbed, and in her haste had dropped it somewhere about the yard. The story of Mrs. Horeton breaking down through grief at the loss of Harry seemed thin; it was because of the disgrace of Kate running away with Smith. And Nell knew it. Mary smiled at Nell's transparent simplicity; it was not a good smile. She felt a malicious gratitude towards Kate for so completely ostracising herself socially. Then she wondered if she would have gone away with Smith if he had asked her, and replied to herself that Kate was a beast of a woman.

When she dismounted at the bank, Mrs. Grant was teaching her last to walk. Mrs. Grant always mixed her remarks on people with comments on her husband's animals. In reply to Mary's question as to whether they had heard of Smith since he went, Mrs. Grant said—

"The sick calf would never have died if he had been there, and that they had not heard."

"It's singular," she said, making herself heard spasmodically above the shrieking of her baby, "how such a bad man should be so fond of animals. When he was nursing that calf through its first attack, he must have been carrying on at the same time with that Horeton girl."

"You know, I suppose, that she dared not go home after the trial. Mother foolishly took her to our place. I refused to see her; it was really too much to expect."

"Mr. Grant would perhaps have overlooked his dreadful conduct, as Smith was so kind to the animals; only he savagely beat Mr. Solomon for some reason we can't find out, which kept him away from the bank a week, and Mr. Grant had to work so hard that the cows were fearfully neglected." The baby here interrupted noisily, as its mother tried to pin some of its anatomy to its clothing. When it was quiet again, Mary resumed—

"Mr. Smith only followed her, and they've gone away together. It has driven Mrs. Horeton mad with shame."

"Good heavens!"—the baby kicked neglectedly—"I thought it was grief that drove her mad."

"They took her to the asylum yesterday, because she

was taking every woman she saw for Kate, and trying to kill her."

"Thank goodness Grant was right. He recommended Smith's dismissal for his conduct. What about Helen?"

"Oh! she's too innocent for such doings. I can't make out where Kate got her dreadful ideas." It did not strike Mrs. Grant that Mary seemed to have a pretty familiar acquaintance with the same ideas. Then Mary saw an account of the breaking in of the horse coming, so she rose, and bade Mrs. Grant a courteous farewell.

Mrs. Grant gave her husband that night reason to commend himself for his wisdom and foresight in letting Smith go, though he still had uneasy regrets for his farmyard, in case Smith should tell things to Mr. Evans.

When Mary reached her home she put Jim's letter carefully away, telling her mother nothing. She thought her mother was rather foolish in some things.

While, without the least evil intention in the world, Mr. Grant enlightened Boorana on the true cause of Mrs. Horeton's insanity, and shook his head sadly at the fall of his whilom bank clerk.

The only man in the place who disbelieved the whole story was his own accountant; but a Jew is never taken seriously in a country township.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

Kate mastered the routine of her work in the Bloopil Hospital so well that she was soon able to work, and think of other matters at the same time. "Other matters" were mainly Jim, and every possible explanation of why he had not sought her came to her mind, but the right one. Even if he were not indifferent, she had expected at least gratitude. Later she learnt what appeared an explanation. Gradually she discovered that her hospital experience was changing the perspective of things. It used to puzzle, sometimes shock her dreadfully, when she saw many young men, some considerably younger than herself, standing round a nude or semi-nude patient, male or female. When she rose from scrubbing floors to actual attendance upon the patients, she learnt they were medical students. Her next impression was that they were an ugly lot for an intellectual one. Afterwards that impression was modified by individual knowledge. But of their intellectual side she saw very little.

In the course of time she observed that several, with their faces to the patient, were yet more attentive to the nurse. But Kate was too busy to remember it long enough to feel interested. The nurse who shared her room, however, seemed to remember nothing else. Kate's indifference made her somewhat unpopular. None was anything approaching as good looking as herself, but she was still too unsophisticated to ascribe it to that. And in spite of their efforts to the contrary, her indifference kept everything personal out of her relations with the students and doctors. But her patience and quickness soon made her popular with the older surgeons, who quickly had her in the operating theatre. It was another revelation. To see men and women cut about, with no consideration but the end in view, horrified her for at least a week. Then, realising its necessity, she took it

as much a matter of course as the surgeons. Men and women became merely cases.

In daily contact with the most terrible suffering, sometimes patiently, sometimes badly borne; seeing men, women and children brought in daily, mangled or diseased to every degree, in a manner hardened her. But it swept many sentimental cobwebs out of her brain, and taught her the true position of her own little trouble in the scale of human pain.

And without being clearly aware of the causes of the change, she determined no longer to struggle without reck of all else but the end to be attained. She wondered occasionally what effects her doings had had upon her own family. She was mercifully ignorant. She determined to bear her cross as patiently as possible. But with the buoyancy of her splendid health and youth, a vision of final happiness tinted all her dreams with hope.

But her wider outlook gave her a truer appreciation of some moral considerations of which she had been entirely ignorant. Mrs. Warren gave her the view of her conduct as it affected herself. The hospital that as it affected others. In her simplicity no opinion of themselves seemed to matter but her own and Jim's. Now she learnt that there was an opinion, expressed through convention and custom, covering nearly all the relations between the sexes. She first understood it in discovering that there were men who valued their outside reputation for clean living, as much as their own consciousness of it; and, further, that they even valued more highly a woman's good repute, and that both were based on sound, though material, considerations. The discovery instantly shattered her greatest illusion. This, then, she believed was the explanation of Jim's silence—shame for himself and for her, though he knew it was undeserved.

This again was modified by another experience, wherein a good reputation covered hideous moral blackness. For a while it made her bitter against her own honesty. Kate had to suffer eventually for this, too, though its cause lay in her deep pity for the victim of a man's need to save appearances.

One of her patients was a girl of about seventeen (Kate

was in the medical ward at the time). When brought in she was not very clean, and with a colour in her cheeks that Kate already knew meant consumption.

When she first attended her, the girl was so grateful for what was a simple duty that Kate was touched. In a week she looked much improved for the good nursing and nourishing food; then Kate found her to be really a beautiful girl—but in the last stages of her disease, with the mental elation peculiar to it, which is expressed in irrepressible hope. She had a wonderful mass of rich golden hair, which, when spread over the bed, reached below her knees. The doctors wished to cut it off, but she was so proud of it that they gave way to her, and Kate spent many a spare half-hour brushing it till it shone, while the girl gazed at her nurse almost worshipfully.

One calm Sunday morning, when off duty, Kate sat on the bedside of her pretty patient when a laughing jackass, perched somewhere on the trees in the hospital grounds, poured forth his strident, but joyous, laugh. The girl listened with surprised wonder; then involuntarily laughed with it. Then she saw Kate's face cloud over, and her head turn quickly away. It was the first time Kate had heard the old familiar sound since she had left home. With a rush, it brought back the time-softened memories of her wild and careless girlhood, when she and Nell stole out in the night and galloped their brumbies after the kangaroos, their only trouble the fear of being found out by their mother.

"What a funny bird, nurse," said the girl, trying to appear as if she had not seen Kate's emotion.

"Have you ever heard it before?" asked Kate, in surprise.

"I've never been out of the city," said the girl.

"I was never in it till a few months ago," said Kate.

"What is the country like, nurse?" Kate began to talk about her old life, gradually warming as her memory recalled the glaring days, the moonlit nights, the bloom of the wattle, and the smell of the eucalyptus; the great silence of the bush on a calm night, and its wild uproar in a gale. Told how the magpies awakened

her every morning with their music; of the restless fly-catchers chirruping "sweet pretty creature" in the night, and their restless ways in the daytime—of the ugly crows and their carrion eating ways—the snowy cockatoos and their harsh shrieking as they flew out on to the plains; then of the sheep covering the hills and plains in their thousands; and lastly of the horses.

The girl listened with wide, wondering eyes, feeling in imagination all the joy of the free bush life—then Kate put her head down beside her little patient's, and cried softly. It was her first touch of home-sickness, and the girl put her hand on Kate's neck caressingly. When Kate recovered, she saw the girl looking at her wistfully.

"You will always have those happy memories, nurse, and though they sometimes give you pain, you will come in time to like the pain for the pleasure of the happy time it reminds you of. I often wondered how it is we can get pleasure out of pain. Is it only us women, nurse, that do it? I remember as a little girl dreaming of being abandoned by my mother, and waking up crying, then carrying on the dream as a waking fancy, and feeling really happy in my pretended misery. I was very little then; mother and I were living all alone. I rarely saw my father; but when he was away, my mother used to cry and cry over me. She wouldn't let me play with the children in the street, because they used to say rude things to me I didn't understand. It was a crowded street in a mean neighbourhood. When mother went out all the women used to stare and laugh rudely, till mother's face was red—I thought it was anger then. The visits of my father gradually became less; mother cried more than ever. Then father's visits ceased. But every month a letter came with money in it, which made mother cry more than ever. She would no longer go out, and I had to look after everything. Mother grew thinner and weaker every day, till one day she was so weak that she fainted. I ran for a doctor. I heard him tell a neighbour who came in that it was consumption. When he went mother gave me a note. The house to which it was addressed was empty, and nobody could tell me where the people had gone. It was such a big house, too. When I told mother she sobbed for hours.

"'Find your father, darling, and tell him I'm dying,' she said at last.

"A week afterwards I saw him step out of a carriage, in which there was a beautifully dressed lady and a little girl of about my own age. I ran to him and told him breathlessly that mother was dying. Then I shrank away, horribly frightened. I knew he recognised me by the hard fury in his cold eyes. He said he was sorry, but to tell a policeman. Then he tried to speak kindly, and said—'Don't take to begging, my little girl; it's degrading.' It was spoken louder for the lady to hear. 'Poor child; how distressing,' she said. Then I heard him tell her that I was probably a liar. Then the three of them walked into this hospital. I didn't understand then. I do now. That night mother died. I was taken to some institution where a lot of ugly old women questioned and stared at me; then got me a situation in a religious household, as sort of nurse to a baby. They were a lot of hypocrites, and sponged on the charitable society for cheap labour. That's what they told me at my next place. I was beaten and half starved till I ran away, and got a situation in a city restaurant as scullery-maid. I was under a dirty old married couple they called cooks who were kind only in not starving and beating me. I had no holidays, working for the cooks when I wasn't working for the restaurant. The kitchen was underground, damp, and wet; the work was heavy, and I was always catching cold. I knew of nothing better, and had no education but what mother gave me" (Kate had often wondered where her little patient had got her gentle voice and nice way of speaking, considering where she came from) "and I didn't know how to go about getting other work, being afraid to advertise for fear I should be found and taken back to the religious family again. When I was sixteen I began to cough like mother. And, nurse, I was glad. It was only when I knew I was going to die that I really began to feel happy. I've never told anybody what I've told you, because they would think I was a beggar or a liar; and when I knew what I was, I was glad, for mother's sake, that she died. My father is a rich and, I think, a powerful man, though I think of him as little as I can, for he's a hateful brute."

"Surely God will punish him," said Kate, with a touch of her early piety.

"I don't know; to punish him would never give me back my mother, and I'm sure it wouldn't please her if he was punished."

It was visiting day a few days later, when ladies brought the patients flowers, foolish tracts, and more foolish eatables. One sad, though dignified, woman put some flowers beside Kate's patient, who looked up brightly to thank her, when a fiery light suddenly leapt into the girl's eyes. The lady put out her hand to caress the beautiful hair, lying loosely about the pillow; but the girl snatched it away savagely. The lady passed on proudly and hurt. Her daughter, a girl of about the same age as the girl, was with her. Observing her closely, Kate saw a distant resemblance to the patient on the bed—and understood. The two children stared at each other—the healthy one resentfully on her mother's account; the sick one half longingly, till she turned her face sadly away. Then the other girl passed on with a toss of her head. Kate went to her little friend, and found her stiffly trying to prevent the tears coming. She stooped and kissed her. The next day the girl said she was sure she would get better, because she had found someone at last to love in Kate, and lived on hopefully for a fortnight. A week after that she died, with her hand in Kate's—died with a contented smile in her face, when she had become so weak as to be insensible of pain.

Kate had no time to give way to grief—she had learnt to love her patient next to her sister Nell—for an epidemic of typhoid broke out. Tents were erected in the hospital grounds, and Kate was put in charge. The work was heavy and responsible. Vigorous and active as she was, the strain began to tell on her. She came off duty languidly one morning. Passing to her room she nearly fell against one of the leading honorary doctors. He glanced at her keenly.

"Come with me, nurse," he said, abruptly. She followed him to the matron's room. He felt her pulse; then called the matron.

"Nurse Thornley had better go to bed for a day or two." The matron went with Kate, and had to help her

undress. Safely in bed, she returned to the doctor.

"Do you think it's ty.?" she asked, speaking the hospital jargon for typhoid.

"I don't think so; but come with me, and I shall sound her." As the doctor proceeded with his examination, he got interested. Kate was thin—"Worn fine," he said, as he ran his stethoscope caressingly along the lines of her intercostal muscles. "But she's sound as a bell, Mrs. Haldane, and ought to be all right after a few days' rest." He was sitting on the bedside. "But she's grand," he said, almost to himself. Then, in the technical language of anatomy, he pointed out each muscle to Mrs. Haldane with an almost loving appreciation, and ended by saying—"I've never seen a better muscled body, or a better textured skin."

Kate smiled up at him languidly, and said—"You'd like to put me in a jar of alcohol as a specimen for the students, doctor?"

"They'd much prefer you as you are, my child," he replied, laughing. Kate blushed, and replaced her dressing jacket. The doctor was an anatomical connoiseur. In ten minutes he was operating on a clumsily-built woman for cancer, who died under the chloroform. He began explaining to the students the cause of her failure; then he pointed out the clumsiness in her anatomy, casually mentioning, in illustration, the difference between the case before them and Nurse Thornley.

It was the first they knew of Kate's illness. There were ten students present; the hearts of three of them throbbed; while all were more keenly interested.

"This woman," continued the doctor, "could not have even passed the bread gracefully; every action of her muscles would have cost them 20 per cent. more effort than Nurse Thornley's. So you see, gentlemen, beauty and utility are very much one and the same thing. This woman had a permanent stoop from the hips, which put a steady and continuous strain on the back muscles which an erect carriage nullifies, and——"

Kate was surprised at the interest taken in such an unimportant person as herself—then grateful. Under the influence of the students' now openly shown admiration, she expanded. Their attentions became less general,

She heard a nurse say that one of them—Wallsend—was rich. It instantly struck her that he might know other men who were rich—might know Smith. He did know him. Kate singled out Wallsend till the others fell away.

He quickly discovered she was more interested in Smith than himself. It pleased him at first, then hurt his vanity, till at last he began to evade Smith in his conversation, only to find Kate grow indifferent to him.

By this time he was infatuated. But he resumed his talk about Smith, jealous of her pleasure when it was commendatory, till he gradually changed its tone. He had heard of Smith's trial for manslaughter, and mentioned it to Kate as a concrete reason why Smith was a blackguard. She knew the secret history of the business better than he did, and looked happier than before. Then he began to invent little damaging escapades, explaining that all wealthy young men were the same.

"Aren't you wealthy?" asked Kate. Wallsend looked annoyed.

"I'm not Smith, though;" and he invented some more anecdotes.

"Where is this terrible young man now?" asked Kate one day.

"Living with an old aunt at Elsternwick; he's had to shut himself up since that affair in the country."

"When and what was that?" asked Kate, cheerfully.

Warned by her tone, Wallsend invented a completely new and later anecdote on the lines of the Boorana affair. Kate's heart sank. All the time Wallsend's own infatuation was obvious—yet Kate never suspected he was a liar. But he began to suspect Kate was the heroine of the Boorana affair. Mentioning it again, he said "That if Smith had been anything but a cad, he'd have married that girl. He'd have moved heaven and earth to find her."

Deep down in her consciousness Kate thought Smith no better than herself—she still believed his confession. She had shown clearly he was forgiven. Could he not have forgiven her? "If he had cared he would," was her answer.

Wallsend slowly trickled vitriol on the ideal Jim Kate had built. Still she silently fought herself and Wallsend to save it. One day she saw him on a tram in Swanston-

street. He was looking troubled and careworn, and her heart throbbed. The tram stopped at a crossing. She took an involuntary step towards him. Then Wallsend's words stung her. She hesitated, and the tram clanged on. That night Wallsend asked her to marry him.

"Wait," she said.

"What for?" he asked, though he knew.

"I don't quite know—I haven't quite made up my mind." She was beginning to feel terribly lonely. The thought of the sad and lonely end of the consumptive girl frightened her. Like her, she was really an outcast. If the nurses found out who she really was, they would ostracise her, and she saw herself growing old, stern, and bitter. Her healthy mind revolted at the idea. Wallsend's infatuation resembled her own for Jim. She would at least receive what she could not give. She tossed all night sleeplessly, but in the morning she was still overshadowed by heavy doubt and approaching despair.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was easy for Jim to come to a general conclusion that he would work—the choice of task was another matter. Next morning he stood aimlessly watching the gardeners. The head gardener began to explain things about plants. Jim got interested; he took up a spade, and asked which bed wanted digging. Pleased with his employer's interest, the gardener pointed out a bed against the fence. Jim dug till the perspiration poured off him, till his back ached. When the bed was done, he thought it didn't look quite like the others; but he was pleased to see that the few weeds in it had disappeared. Some of them were rather big, and he wondered how it was they had been let grow. He called the head gardener to question him. As he approached Jim saw a look of anxiety stealing over his face, which quickly changed to annoyance, then to disgust.

"What's the matter?" asked Jim.

"You've dug under all the candytuft, sir."

"You mean those weeds," said Jim, pointing to a leaf showing above the mould.

"They ain't weeds, sir." He took up the spade, and poked it about. "And you've dug only half the bed." Jim looked incredulous. "Look here, sir, you've left a spade's width untouched between every spadefull you turned, and you've broken half the stalks off those dahlias."

"I'd forgot them as I was stepping backwards," said Jim, contritely.

"You'd better come and watch me for a bit, sir, and I'll show you how to dig."

Jim was bewildered—even ignorant of how to turn over a few clods of earth. He meekly walked behind the gardener and watched him closely. The clumsy spade went in and out amongst the most delicate branched plants, turning all the soil, right up to their roots, and breaking never a twig; while the soil was so smooth after it that

it did not want raking; and, though standing right amongst them, his big boots crushed nothing. Jim tried again. The worried look of the gardener flustered him; but, no matter how careful he was, he was always breaking or injuring something.

"I think you'd better go on to plain digging, sir. This wants more practice than you've had."

Jim thought so, too. But the vegetable garden seemed rather a come-down. He tried it, however; but when he saw one of the under gardeners going over it all after him, he came to the conclusion that he was made for other occupations. He took to planning alterations in the general design, leaving details to his head gardener. But even there it ended in the gardener doing the planning and Jim the paying, for he found he had to possess a special knowledge of every plant in the garden, as they never suited the places he proposed for them. He spent a whole month and £500 in finding out how ignorant he was of his own garden. Then he gave it up.

"Mum, I guess I'll take up some study I'm more familiar with. I'm fond of reading, have a good general knowledge of science—I think I'll take to experimental investigation."

"I hope you won't fill the place with grubs and snakes, Jim."

"That won't be my line. I've sometimes thought of —let me see now—" He ran through the names of a dozen branches of experimental science.

"Good heavens! Jim, what a lot you know," said his aunt in astonishment.

"That's only half of them. I've left out all the chemical branches. Anyway, that's only the names. Let's see, explosives is a good branch of chemistry"—his face got animated. "Look here, mum, what do you think of being able to blow up the place with your cotton aprons?" She looked at him dubiously. "It's all right, mum; I don't literally mean to do it, but you really can blow up a house with a handkerchief or two."

"My dear boy, you'd better stick to gardening."

Jim was pained; doubt of his sanity roused his obstinacy.

"Bother gardening. I'm going to experiment with explosives."

"Jim, my boy, you'll hurt yourself."

"Do you take me for a fool, mummy?"

She was silent. He stalked out wrathfully. Returning in an hour, he was laden with sundry jars, retorts, and books. Then his aunt knew he was bent on mischief. The idea that he could blow up a house with a harmless handkerchief had appealed irresistibly to his imagination. Still he did not like to take risks in the house, for fear of frightening his aunt into hysterics, which were his bete noir. He built a room in the middle of a two-acre paddock full of trees, which screened his workroom from the road. He worked steadily for a week, coming to his meals crossly, and eating them hurriedly, which gave him an attack of indigestion. He worked till at last he got a mixture of nitric acid, glycerine, and cotton—for the last he stole all the dusters in the house. To first get an idea of the power of explosives, he emptied a tin of ordinary black gunpowder on the ground, and fired it off with a match on the end of a long stick. It puffed off with a great cloud of smoke, making him black and radiant. But a match on the end of a stick seemed rather primitive for gun-cotton. A happy idea made him smile; he would combine electrical with chemical experiments. Running inside, he pulled down the electric bell and its three Leclanche cells; then borrowed a gardeners' alarm clock—the gardener was busy elsewhere at the time. He connected up the batteries and the bell, put a small thread of the gun-cotton where he saw the small blue spark when the bell was ringing; then he fixed one wire on to the hour hand of the clock and the other in a position for the minute hand to touch it in ten minutes, and complete the circuit. He saw nothing to tremble at, not realising there was any danger in making an accidental circuit; but, fortunately, the face of the clock was cardboard. There were about six times as much gun-cotton as powder; so it struck Jim he would be safer away from the actual explosion. He went for a walk. It was only when he had been gone nine minutes that he thought of its possible effect on his workroom. Then he remembered with a shock that

he had told no one to keep away from it. He swore whole-heartedly, and started home with all the demons of fear at his heels, and never knew before what an infinitesimal moment a minute was. He was only one-quarter the way back, when he heard a dull roar. Yelling children and barking dogs ceased their noise for a moment, then shrieked and howled tenfold, and Jim saw a general rush towards his place. Leaping the fence, he found his workroom walls flat and blazing, its roof lying drunkenly on its back, and everything else black and smashed to matchwood; while his aunt was vainly trying to detect Jim's blackened bones amongst the charred wood.

"It's all r——" he began. But she turned with a gasp, and nearly upset him with the energy of her hug. Nobody thought it ridiculous but Jim. A couple of policemen and two reporters arrived and took possession, particularly the reporters, who questioned like theologians, dimly hoping somebody was hurt, and going away disappointed that the charred timbers were not Jim's bones.

Next day an astounding description of flying timbers, hairbreadth escapes, and whole skies full of smoke appeared in the Liberal paper. Jim was painted as a hero of modern scientific progress, who daily took his life in his hands in the interest of his country and its military defence.

When the gardener read the article, he said those reporters stole his clock. When the hero read it he looked blank. Kate read it and cut it out. The following Saturday a leading article appeared in the Conservative organ, pointing its weekly moral, and adorning the tale with Jim. It did not mention names, but—"The young gentleman smiled on by the goddess of fortune, turning his leisure and his wealth to the wresting from the bosom of nature her powerful secrets—rent therefrom at imminent risk of life and limb—was a noble example of the active restlessness of all classes, rich and poor alike, so characteristic of the times, which might be imitated by others like him"—Jim grinned—"to the still greater advantage of science and his country." It cured Jim of his scientific ardour. Kate cut it out, too.

Jim began to mope again. A note from Evans expressed a wish to see him.

"Do you remember your promise, Mr. Smith, about opening an account with us when you should leave the bank?"

"I remember it now; but I had forgotten it. I shall see to it at once."

They began to talk generally. Then Jim noticed, or thought he did, a subtle change in Mr. Evans' manner. He had heard his father speak of Mr. Evans as an upright man. Jim remembered the remark, and became constrained and reserved. When they parted Jim's nerves were tingling. He began to go out to theatre parties, balls, etc., observing keenly the manner of his old friends or acquaintances towards himself. Apparently there was no difference; but in those whom he thought were honourable, he felt a subtle change. Then those acquaintances whom he knew were shaky in their ways seemed to greet him more familiarly—more as one of themselves. He ceased to mope, but his aunt saw Jim's face growing harder.

It was at a big football match that he met Wallsend again. Jim had never liked him, for he knew him to be malicious often, and a drunkard on occasion. He was feeling malicious, too, and Wallsend for a moment suited him. Jim said things in his bitter mood which he did not believe. Wallsend replied to them quite as a matter of course, and in kind. He went further, and put a question to Jim laughingly about the girl who had got him into trouble in the country. Jim felt the hot blood rush to his head, till all he could see was a scarlet haze. The crowd rescued Wallsend, then shielded Jim when the police came. He mooned for days after, while his aunt saw him getting thin, and careless in his dress.

Spring came and found him still moping; then he resumed yachting because it seemed to take him away from people more. But everywhere around the bay he found acquaintances warm whom he wished cool, and old friends cool whom he wished warm; he was becoming hyper-sensitive. Sailing home from Williamstown after a week's absence, he saw a beautiful schooner of 130 tons lying at anchor. The grace of her sheer and the rake

of her tall masts suggested visions of a cruise amongst flower garlanded tropical islands. His aunt noticed he was a little more cheerful when he arrived home. He revealed what he thought of doing.

"Going where the missionaries are?" she asked. Jim nodded and confirmed himself in his intention then and there.

His aunt had a firm belief that all people not white required flannel petticoats to make them modest, and a Bible to teach them the truth. She became keenly interested.

"How long will you be before starting, Jim?"

"About three weeks if I can get the boat."

She brought out a missionary map, covered with big red dots, showing the mission stations.

"Now show me where you propose to go?" He indicated his probable course. She suggested about fifty more places.

"How long do you think I shall be away, mum? It would take me two years to call at all those places, and I won't be in the South Seas till after the summer. I must wait till the hurricane season is over."

"Oh, don't go, Jim. Hurricanes! I thought it was always calm there."

"I'll go south and call at New Zealand first, then go north."

On enquiring he found the yacht would be sold willingly, the wealthy young Englishman who owned it being heartily tired of her and the sea, too. Jim purchased at once, and had a 50 horse-power oil engine put into it, spending most of the day at the slip watching the men at work, but not offering to help. His gardening experiences had taught him humility. When she was ready he changed her name to the "Scapegrace" in a fit of ironical humour; then looked out for a crew. Hearing that a wealthy young man wanted sailors, all the wasters in the port rushed him. There were bow-legged, knock-kneed, fat and thin men—some of them sailors, most of them bad imitations. Jim knew just enough not to take them. Jim passed a Marine Board examination and got

a master's certificate, determining to do his own navigating; then looked out for two boatswains to do the sailing. A medium-sized man presented himself one day. He had the simple face of the deep-sea sailor, and answered with the disciplined quickness characteristic of him. Jim liked his face, and admired the great breadth of his muscular shoulders. He asked Johnston to walk round the yacht with him, who at once suggested a few alterations which seemed obviously necessary when indicated, though Jim had not thought of them. He engaged Johnston at once, mentioning wages half as much again as were customary. Johnston's face brightened.

"Look here, Mr. Johnston, I've had all the rag-tag and bob-tail of the port wanting to sign on. I'll leave the selection of a crew to you; you can offer £6 a month."

"I'll get you as good a crew as ever sailed for that, sir."

"Have you sailed much in a fore and after?"

"All over the Pacific, sir."

"I think we'll get on, then. I'm going to the islands."

When Jim and his aunt came on board a few days later, things were already looking ship-shape. Johnston was amidships working and shouting orders; while Jim noted the crew moved and looked as if capable.

"Oh, Jim, what a cockle-shell!" said his aunt, when she glanced round.

"She's safer than a steamer," said Jim, reassuringly.

Jim and his aunt were sitting on the verandah in their usual place a few days before he was to sail, both a little sad at the coming parting.

"I almost wish you were not going, my boy; the boat seems so small"—she hesitated a moment—"and I've met such a nice girl; she's so beautiful, and has been helping me to make the things for the poor heathen." He looked at her quizzically.

"Want to anchor me ashore, eh, mum?"

"You're so very restless that I think you ought to marry. It would settle you."

"Undoubtedly."

"Now, don't be facetious, my boy."

"Who's the girl, mum?"

"She's a hospital nurse, and takes such a keen interest in missionary work. Her name is Miss Thornley. Mrs.

Wallsend introduced me to her."

"The mother of that brute of a student! I don't think much of her credentials. Why doesn't she keep her nice girl for him?"

"I think she's too good for him."

"Well, keep her for me till I return. I've been nearly settled by a girl before—and I guess I'm tired of experiments." They both laughed.

Jim was not yet suspicious of himself; but he had learnt to be a little too suspicious of others. In two days he sailed.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Though Kate was not actually engaged to Wallsend, she was left almost entirely to him by the other men, who believed she was, and were rather sorry for her. They often wondered what she saw in him, not knowing she liked him for his knowledge of another man. Wallsend knew it, though he kept the knowledge as carefully suppressed as his jealousy would permit. At every opportunity he spoke dispassionate evil of Jim, till Kate at last refused to listen, and once or twice quarrelled in the hope of getting rid of him; but he always came back to her with a humble apology. He frequently asked her to marry, but she could never make up her mind to cut herself finally away from the hope of meeting Jim, and having him explain things. Exactly what she wanted him to explain, she did not ask herself. Sometimes her heart grew sick with longing to see Nell; but with the thought of her there always came the memory of her mother's fury, and her father's contemptuous refusal to permit her to drive home with him. She was too busy for her mind to linger on painful memories very long, and she put them aside as much as possible, though a feeling of despair came to her more and more frequently.

Two days after his quarrel with Smith on the football ground, Wallsend turned up at the hospital with his arm in a sling and a black eye. To sympathetic enquiries he told a tale of a barrackers' row, wherein he shone somewhat indifferently from the facts. But he had discovered that if he ever hoped to marry Kate he would have to do everything in his power to keep her from meeting Smith.

"By the way, I met your friend Smith last Saturday. He was at the football match," said Wallsend to Kate, when he got the opportunity. Warned by experience, Kate did not show any particular concern.

"I hope that had nothing to do with it?" she asked,

nodding towards his black eye. Wallsend turned white with temper; but held himself admirably.

"It had, indirectly; Smith started a row." Kate looked interested in spite of herself. "He's going rapidly to the dogs, I'm sorry to say, for he was in a cheap part of the ground with a low crowd—drunk, offering to fight anybody for 5s. The crowd stood his bullying for a time, then turned on him." Kate went pale. "But there was a decent part which protected him, though getting somewhat mauled for their pains." He pointed to his arm. "We bundled him into a cab at last, and sent him home to his aunt."

Kate was very quiet for the rest of the day. When off duty she took a green tram—remembering it was a green tram she had seen Jim on—and went to St. Kilda. It was a calm day, with the sea oily in its smoothness. She sat on the end of the pier, gazing abstractedly at the water, thinking of how often Jim must have looked at it; perhaps sitting on the same seat. Then her memory wandered back to her first meeting with him, and to the stories he used to tell about his travels. As she gazed at the water, it reminded her of his love for it, and in spite of her sadness, seeing something which she knew he loved made her pass a few rarely pleasant hours.

"You must meet my people," said Wallsend to her next day. "I've told them I want to marry you, so of course they're anxious to see you."

He did not say his mother spoke contemptuously of "that nursing woman," and that his father stormed at him for a fool in not looking for an influential marriage. But as he seemed immovable, they had become really anxious to see her, hoping that at least she did not misplace her h's, or drop her g's.

Kate happened to call on the first day of the sewing bee, which was making the little niggers' flannel garments for Smith to distribute. Their talk was entirely new and strange to Kate. She was sitting near a middle-aged lady, who seemed to be the principal personage in the business. Kate observed her with puzzled curiosity; there was something familiar to her in the lady's face, though the name, Miss Anstey, revealed nothing. Miss Anstey frequently mentioned her nephew with a maternal

pride, spoke about his cruise and his intentions, till Kate got quite interested.

Miss Anstey had seen Kate enter, and saw with wonder that, beautiful as she was, she was unhappy. When Wallsend brought his mother in, Kate recognised the woman whose patronage her little consumptive patient had resented. Kate wondered how much she knew, and saw her pride was that of the purse, though her sadness was very genuine. The husband followed shortly after, and Kate saw in him a likeness to her patient, but a bad one—his face was cunning and cruel. She looked at him with a quiet directness that had first drawn Jim to her. Mr. Wallsend shifted uneasily, and looked away, as if he would hide an unpleasant admiration, taking an instant dislike to her.

"The girl looked as if she knew too much," he said afterwards, "and for a poor woman is far too independent."

"But look how beautiful she is," said his son.

"Admitted, and that's the only reason we can accept her. She'll adorn the home of a wealthy man, as you'll be, my boy."

After the introduction, Kate sat beside Miss Anstey, and entered a discussion on the making of garments for people of unknown dimensions. There was so much room for discussion that they forgot everything else, and Miss Anstey learnt a high respect for Kate's deftness with the scissors and needle, though as often as possible Kate turned the conversation to the wonderful nephew who seemed so daring and original.

It was not till she had met Miss Anstey for the third time that Kate found out Jim was the wonderful nephew, which explained the familiarity in her appearance that had puzzled her. Miss Anstey had learnt sooner why Kate was brought to the house, and quickly saw Kate was there only on sufferance, and wondered why she was there at all, for she knew Jim's opinion of Wallsend. She tried to make Kate talk about herself, but found her singularly. reticent.

Elsie Wallsend recognised in Kate the nurse who had attended the patient who was so rude to her mother, and tried to get Kate to tell her all about the consumptive.

She was shocked to hear the girl was dead, and more shocked to hear she was glad to die; but was incapable of understanding such a state of mind, as she knew nothing as yet about misfortune and pain; so she listened to Kate with an uncomprehending frown, which was half disbelief; then put the matter aside like an unpleasant memory.

It was on Kate's fourth visit when Miss Anstey grew confidential.

"You see, I want to keep my boy as occupied as possible, for he has been very much upset during the last twelve months. If he has time to think he gets very unhappy."

"Has he been ill?" asked Kate, sympathetically, yet feeling a kind of elation.

"Worse than that. He went into the country and got into a terrible scrape through some woman; she said something dreadful about him in a law court, which deprived him of his self-respect, and her of her good name. Of course, he and she knew it wasn't true, and if he had been less sensitive, it wouldn't have mattered, as far as he was concerned, though I often pity the poor girl, as Jim does." That was not strictly true, but Miss Anstey was thinking more of the scarlet petticoat she was making than of the exact value of her words, and she did not see Kate's face stiffen, and her hand begin to tremble. "I think my boy was in love with her—in fact, I'm sure he was, for the night he came home after the trial—he was tried for manslaughter, you know"—Kate knew, but nodded mechanically—"he had a great fight with himself, and decided she did not care for him, that she wasn't worth caring for." That also was not strictly true. "I'm sure he did not tell me everything"—she did not really know whether he had or not—"but I was glad, my dear, for I couldn't understand that woman." She shook her head sadly. "Jim hasn't been the same man since. It has made him afraid of his old friends—of those he valued, that is—for it was all printed in the papers, you know; and he hates to be thought worse than he is. And I know he's one of the best men in the world."

On the subject of Jim, Miss Anstey was inexhaustible, which was fortunate for Kate, who continued working

automatically, almost blindly. At last Miss Anstey looked round at the unusual quietness.

"You're not looking well, Miss Thornley. I've bored you. I think you'd better go out into the air."

She hurried away for a glass of wine. Kate drank it, and went as quickly as politeness would let her, straight to her room in the hospital. She had prayed and hoped passionately that her evidence at the trial would not seriously affect Jim, and now she fully realised that in ostracising herself she had, to some extent at least, done the same for him. She lay on her bed crying silently and bitterly, not from the back of throat, as women usually do, but from her heart, which was nearly broken.

Unknown to Kate, the matron had opened the door and looked in, but had tactfully left her to herself, and thought hardly of Wallsend. Next morning she told Kate to take a day's rest, as she was not looking well.

Kate took a tram to St. Kilda again. It was the day she knew Jim was to sail—and sat on the end of the pier. She asked a waterman to point out the "Scapegrace," then sat down and watched. She saw first one sail, then another, go up, saw the boat's nose pointing straight towards her, then turn slowly, fatefully away, and the yacht began to move slowly, reluctantly, then rapidly through the water, exposing a shining line of copper as she lay over to the breeze. Kate watched till it sank below the edge of the sea. Then her heart was seized with a wild longing—such a fierce pain—that she would have shrieked if she had been alone. Despair had come to her at last.

Next day she told Wallsend the whole story of her connection with Smith, concealing nothing. Wallsend's mouth had an exceeding bitter taste in it when she had done, not because he thought she was a liar, but because it revealed to him that she could love no man on earth as she loved Smith, and because he was convinced by her revelation that she had been his mistress. She left him to consider whether he would ask her again, not caring in the least whether he did or not. When he came at last and asked, she thought it rather noble of him, and said yes.

Kate never learnt that Wallsend had invited her to

meet his people in order that she would meet Miss Anstey, so that she could learn from the aunt that Jim no longer cared for her—after he had first found out Miss Anstey's opinion of Jim's affection for Kate, and that Kate was really the heroine of Jim's romance; and though it was bitter to learn from Kate's own lips how much she still loved Jim, he also knew that Jim loved her, in spite of his aunt's belief to the contrary; and the black eye he received had as much to do with his finally asking her to marry him as his love, and he found the double gratification of his revenge and passion, when she at last consented.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The day before he sailed Jim spent with his aunt; they did not speak much, though she told him her young nurse friend was engaged, or supposed to be, to young Wallsend.

"If she's the decent girl you think, I'm sorry for her, for he'll be a brute to her," said Jim, and he wondered casually what he would think if he heard Kate was about to be married to him, but told himself she was hardly as bad as to deserve that fate. He said his farewell to his aunt at home.

Johnston had everything ready to start by two in the afternoon. An east wind was blowing, so they started under sail. When under way, Jim's melancholy became peculiarly mixed with pleasure at the smooth motion of the swiftly gliding yacht. He sat on the windward taffrail, watching the yellow shore of the west beach glide by; saw some black dots he knew were human figures on the long black streak which was the St. Kilda pier—never remotely dreaming that one of them was Kate. Past the Red Bluff, the low green cliffs of Brighton and Half-moon Bay, with the bay opening into the port as the yacht advanced, the surge singing a siren song under the bows, and the wind humming pleasantly in the taut weather rigging. The yacht seemed to be nodding graceful farewells as the wind heeled her, then drawing herself up proudly as the puff passed.

The crew were watching her critically, which gradually changed to admiration at her speed; she was a vast improvement on the clumsy sailing ships to which they were accustomed. Four hours later they passed through the Heads, and set a course for the south-east. Jim was bound first for the Macquarie Islands, for no other reason except that they were rarely visited, and a great deal cooler than Melbourne. For three days they had good sailing breezes; then the wind swung into the south-west, with every promise of a heavy blow. Johnston was in

charge and directing an A.B. who was a novice at steering small boats. The black sky and rising sea were giving Jim a strange feeling, in which fear was in a queer way mixed with pleasure. He offered to take the wheel for a spell.

"Do you know anything about steering a fore and after, sir?" asked Johnston.

"I've brought a 30-ton yawl through a gale in the bay."

Johnston nodded to the steersman, and Jim took the wheel. There was an immediate improvement in the dryness of the yacht; his skill gave him a sense of mastery—he began to play with her. He would let a wave surge right under the bows, till its top looked over the bulwarks threateningly; then pass it under her, snarling angrily as it tossed her spitefully upwards with a vicious heave. The excitement of the game grew on Jim, till he began to playfully let some of the water on board—a very little at first, then in larger quantities. The watch on deck clustered forward, admiring his skill apprehensively. Jim grew reckless. One wave beat him, and pouring over the side it swept aft, nearly taking him off his feet. The watch below came on deck in alarm, and the whole crew began to murmur. Jim got angry, and, therefore, more reckless. Johnston ordered three reefs in the main and try sails. Jim was careful till it was done; then started playing again, gradually losing sight, in his excitement, of the fact that he was playing with death. The crew did not; they scowled alternately at Jim and Johnston, who was also beginning to look anxious.

"Be careful, sir; it's a bit risky," he said.

"Go to the devil," said Jim, excitedly. Johnston called the other boatswain.

"Take the wheel," he ordered, and put his hand on Jim's shoulder. He clung defiantly to the spokes, which let the yacht pay off, and brought a green sea over the starboard bow. The men hung on to the rigging. Johnston grasped the loose ends of the reef points on the boom. Rushing aft, the water swept the feet from under Jim and the boatswain's mate, trailing out their oilskin-covered bodies like fat yellow seaweed. With a heavy lurch to leeward the yacht rolled the water off her deck,

staggered upright, then bounded on again. Johnston ran to the wheel and threw Jim away from it. Jim turned back and struck him. Johnston knocked him down. Jim rose to his feet, and crawled below, cowed, and feeling vindictive. The wind rose to a gale from the south-west, and brought up a sea that pitched and twisted the yacht about until Jim did not know whether he was on his head or his heels. Water thundered on to her decks continuously; while Jim was so seasick that he hoped they would be stove in, and send him, with his humiliation and Johnston, to the botton. In the morning it was calmer and his sickness gone. Going on deck, he found Johnston looking white and weary, having been on duty all through the night with the whole crew, half of which he had sent below just as Jim came up. He greeted Jim in his usual manner—Jim had half expected him to bluster; but became absorbed in the magnificent waves rolling up to and under the yacht, and spent the whole day in admiring Johnston's skill in sailing her. It was not till late in the afternoon that Johnston went below. When he came on deck again to take the middle watch, Jim was leaning on the after companion, and called him over.

"You only did your duty last night, Mr. Johnston. Will you accept my apology?"

Johnston looked at Jim with astonishment. No superior officer had ever apologised for a mistake before, though he had been at sea fourteen years. His face softened wonderfully, and with a curt nod he walked aft. While Jim had made the first firm friend, and conquered himself for the first time in his life.

In four days more they reached the Macquarie Islands, spent a day in looking at the penguin rookeries, handed one of Miss Anstey's boxes of garments to the ragged and grateful crew of a penguin oil schooner, then sailed for the Bluff. When they arrived he gave the crew a day off, and spent it himself in mainly chasing his hat from behind his head, which it was continually hitting from the end of its string as the wind tossed it playfully off. He arrived back at the wharf in time to see the Greymouth steamer leave, which had hardly gone a mile when a woman hurried on to the pier, and, seeing the steamer,

stood stock still, the picture of despair, then sat down on some bags of oysters and began to cry. As Jim walked away she seemed to be growing hysterical; it hurt him so much that he went back to her.

"Don't cry, my good woman, perhaps I can be of some help to you, I'm going to Greymouth in my yacht to-morrow."

"Oh, are you, sir? It was so important that I should catch the boat, and there's no other for a fortnight."

"There are no ladies on my boat, and, ah——" he hesitated.

"I'll explain to my husband; I'm sure he will be grateful to you, too." She glanced at him with pathetic, tear-stained eyes.

Jim did not understand what was wrong with the crew when she got on board, and rather resented the pitying look Johnston gave him. In the light of the cabin lamp Jim saw she was pretty, with hair nearly as fine a red as Kate's, and about her height. She was quietly dressed, and moved gracefully. Jim gave her his own cabin, and slept in the deck house. The steamer from Melbourne arrived during the night. When it was leaving next morning, it passed about fifty yards away from the yacht; its passengers stared at her and the woman sitting on deck, while Jim wished uncomfortably she had stayed below. An hour after he raised his anchor and sailed for Greymouth, foregoing a visit to the Sounds in the pleasure of performing a disinterested service. But he wished that Johnston had seen the crew had not brought any drink on board, which was the only way he could explain their inability to look at him without grinning. He found his passenger sang remarkably well, though he wished she knew more than "Hymns, Ancient and Modern." The night before reaching Greymouth he went to bed early, in order to be up early to navigate the yacht in. He was awakened by the crew bellowing the chorus of the latest music hall song. When the solo started again he could scarcely believe his ears, as he recognised the sweet voice of his passenger rollicking it out with all the verve and go of a trained soubrette. Jim hastily dressed and went on deck. She was sitting

on the knee of the cook, with one arm round his neck, and holding a glass of beer in the air with the other. A sailor saw Jim and sprang to his place; the rest of the watch followed him. The passenger rose, too.

"Come an' 'ave a drink along 'o me," she sang defiantly.

"Put that woman into the deck house till the morning —pitch her overboard if she kicks up a row," ordered Jim, and stalked below, with the maddening knowledge that fourteen men were in an agony of grinning self-restraint.

"What do you know about the business?" asked Jim of Johnston, when she had gone ashore, after thanking Jim effusively.

"She's known as Bluff Kitty; she bet the cook a pound she'd get a free passage to Greymouth in your boat. I didn't know till after we'd left the Bluff, or you can depend it wouldn't have happened."

"I remember, now, you seemed to recognise her."

"I thought you knew her, too," said the bo'sun, rather shamefacedly, and therefore thought it was no business of mine."

Jim was learning self-distrust rapidly. Recognising that he would be the laughing stock of every port he visited in New Zealand, he determined to sail straight to the South Seas.

Then came a long period of dreamy motion over calm, sun-light sea, with favourable winds day after day, while the bo'sun beguiled the time relating his experiences.

"What sent you to sea?" asked Jim, one day.

"That's a short story, and not a pleasant one. My father was a drunkard, my mother was that fond of him she neglected us, so I ran wild and got into trouble at fifteen, which would have put me in gaol if I'd been caught, so I ran away to sea, where I've been ever since, hoping some day to save enough to become a farmer. That was my old man's ambition; he came to Australia to be a freeholder, and he would have succeeded if another fellow hadn't swindled him."

"Who was it?" asked Jim, carelessly.

"A chap named Horeton; he's got a big place somewhere in Victoria."

Jim sat up suddenly.

"I know the man. Do you know any more about him?"

"Wait a bit." Jim's memory was tingling. "Go on, he said at last. Perhaps what you can tell me will bring it back to my mind."

"What?" asked Johnston.

"Never mind, you go ahead."

"When my father was drunk I often used to hear him maundering about how Horeton, he, and another fellow named Smith had entered into a partnership to get some land together, which they agreed to cut into three equal farms when they'd got enough; then of how Horeton had turned dog on Smith and my father, through some legal 'funny' business he had found out. Smith and my father took it out of Horeton's skin when they found out the law wouldn't help 'em. My mother used to say it was his disappointment what made my father a drunkard. Anyway, I didn't think or believe much about it till I heard Horeton was a big land owner, and forgot all about it in my own mischief. When I came back from my first voyage six years after, all my people were dead, and I could never find out which Smith it was that had all their papers. But as I knew my mother had a hard job to keep things going, I didn't think it could be worth bothering about; while rich men don't seem to like the sons of their poor friends bothering 'em."

In a flash Jim remembered his father's deathbed, his effort to speak, and the name Johnston, as he looked at the safe. Jim had seen the packet with that name written across it, in a hurried look through the papers. From that moment till now he had forgotten all about it.

"You ought have advertised, Johnston, for it was my father who was your father's friend, and I have a packet of papers which must be yours. As soon as we get to Melbourne I'll look through it and see, and if you're the son of the same name, I'll hand them to you."

"I don't suppose, then, you know what they're about, sir?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but expect they're letters or something your mother wished you to get."

"Then I'll be glad to have them," said Johnston, quietly looking at Jim, who went and leant over the rail of the counter, and stared musingly at the widening lines of bubbles which marked the passage of the vessel through the water. Johnston's story made him vaguely uncomfortable. He wondered why his father had never mentioned the quarrel to him. It must have been peculiarly bitter, for though Miss Anstey rarely spoke of it, and knew nothing of the details; she also mentioned it in tone of dread, as if it were something too dreadful.

Jim forgot the moving vessel, and the rippling water glided by unseen and unheard. His memory had transported him back to Boorana. One by one the events that had happened there went through his mind, but, under the illuminating influence of Johnston's story, they all began to look different. The musing look vanished from his eyes, and his brain began to piece them together in a different pattern. He had thought nothing of the look of fear which Mr. and Mrs. Horeton had given him on Harry's tennis court. Then there was the passionate love she had openly shown for her son. Jim's eyes brightened. How much did Kate know of her father's early history? Her threat to punish him at her mother's instigation? It looked superficially like an elaborate scheme on Kate's part. But did her mother know that Kate had bargained with him to marry Nell? Of course she could not. Then it was true that Kate and Nell were unhappy in their home life. Her evidence at the trial, then, was because she had cared for him on her own account. What if she had not received his letter? Or if she had, and believed that his denial of the confession was untrue. But she did not know it was untrue before receiving the letter.

"Oh, why did God give us brains and blind us to their use?" muttered Jim, helplessly, as he finally saw that his own ignorance as much as her's, subtly woven with his vanity, had so terribly blinded him. The blood surged through him in a wave of shame. Then he leapt to his feet.

"I'm going straight to Melbourne, Johnston. Steer for Sydney, and crack on as much sail as you dare," he shouted. Johnston wonderingly obeyed.

The following day the engine was driving them on a calm sea at nine miles an hour, when the yacht almost stopped with a loud thud, and every timber quivered as if with fright, while those who were standing were thrown down. Johnston ran forward, and found the end of a water-logged mast stuck in the bows. At the same moment the man at the engine threw in the reversing lever, and pulled the vessel free. It instantly began to take water into the hold. Johnston cursed the man's stupidity, and ordered the boats to be provisioned as thoroughly as the time permitted, Jim obeying orders as readily as one of the crew. The bow was already level with the water as they pushed off. When they were two hundred yards away she kicked up her stern with a slow roll and sank.

"Blast it all," said the boatswain; which was her epitaph.

Jim spent the first day in angrily speculating on why two such minute objects should, at a particular moment, and in a particular manner, when he was in a particular hurry, hit each other in a place where there was room for all the ships in the world to pass. Next day he spent thinking of fanciful schemes for catching flying fish and condensing water. There were fifteen men in the three boats, with enough water for two days, and they were four days from Fiji, at the shortest computation for the speed of their small boats. Jim spent the fourth day in a hazy dream, in which he imagined himself a monster, who wanted to drink the blood of some harmless-looking animals which sat and stared, but kicked him petulantly if he moved towards them, at which he shed tears. On the fifth day he dreamt he was being pulled into heaven on a rope, or somewhere equally pleasant, and when he felt the soft trickle of water down his throat he knew he was rescued; but that it did not matter much anyway, and fell asleep. He was awakened by the smell of rancid cocoanut oil, and guessed he was on a copra trader, and Johnston came to him.

"I think you're all right now, sir."

"Of course," said Jim, "but take your hand off my foot, I want to get up. Good Lord! am I as weak as that?"

He was unable to lift it.

"You're lucky, sir; Jones and Schmidt are dead."

The trading schooner reached Suva next day, where Jim and the crew took a fortnight to recover. Then he sailed for Melbourne, taking Johnston with him.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

For reasons she did not enter into in detail, but which Wallsend understood, Kate insisted upon a very quiet wedding. It was no new thing for a woman to marry a man to please him, merely because she could not marry a man to please herself; nor were its consequences new. Wallsend quickly resented in his wife a want of sympathy that was apparently a charm in the maid. But the necessity for study to complete his course at the university kept him from active resentment, while he had every reason to be content with her management of his home.

When he was a full-fledged M.B. he took a house in East Melbourne, put up a brass plate, and spent a few hours in proudly contemplating it, and a few more in his natty surgery waiting for patients. Unfortunately his father's allowance made them unnecessary, so that when he had a few of his old student friends to supper, and a patient came, he or she was politely requested to go round the corner to doctor So-and-So. His friends were not the best of the students; they had too much time on their hands. Mrs. Wallsend did not understand them. When she was out of the room she would hear them laughing uproariously, but if she came suddenly into the room they became just as suddenly very quiet. These parties occurred at shorter and shorter intervals.

During the day time all Wallsend's women folk and their friends formally called. They came in hansoms, natty broughams, or landaux, with footmen. They were clothed in dresses made, in many cases, by European dressmakers of fame; but Kate found they were interested in little else but dresses and their eclecticism. They never called it that, and would have suspected a dictionary of irony for containing such a word, for they were abnormally sensitive about their humility. They were also highly aesthetic, and showed their appreciа-

tion of their humility by artistically placing the evil in their friends in the highest light. Kate had lost most of her interest in dress, knew nothing about the morals of her callers' acquaintances, and less about ritualism and charity. She was so different from them all that they could not help, and were scarcely blamable for feeling a little covert hostility towards her; which was heightened by the unspoken refusal of her husband and herself to explain her parentage and origin. It was her father-in-law who resented it most, for it was his boast that he always liked everything to be above-board.

In Miss Anstey Kate found she had a friend upon whom she could rely in a social difficulty, and who had enough social influence to tell in Kate's favour, when it was necessary to exert it. A woman with an independent income of £2,000 a year, and an unattached nephew wealthier still, is always a power in the society of a big colonial city. Miss Anstey was frequently surprised at Kate's affection for her, and often saw in her that direct, quiet glance, which she somehow found wholly flattering. Kate was only seeing the turns of expression and movements which were reflections of what she remembered in Jim; in the aunt she saw the nephew, and loved her accordingly.

As the weeks passed, Miss Anstey saw a change coming over Kate. She looked sadder, and came more and more often to see her.

Wallsend behaved devotedly, and in a gentlemanly way to his wife exactly a week after setting up house, then his sense of possession palled a little. His companions were such that they stirred it artificially for a time, for he often saw them glance at her in a way that would have made most husbands kick them out. They even made envious remarks to him, which only made Wallsend laugh. They went further, till a few decent, though reckless, fellows unobtrusively dropped Wallsend's acquaintance, with a great pity for his beautiful wife in their hearts. Wallsend came home drunk at the end of a month. It was then Miss Anstey first noted Kate seemed sad. He was drunk again two days later, and came to her maudlin and with leering eyes; when her face showed more plainly than she could help

disgust fighting with pity, he sat back and laughed in a hard way. He was just drunk enough to drop the mask from his real self.

"You're a shu—superior woman, Kate, and feel sho—sorry for me when you're not disgusted." Kate went and quietly sat opposite him. He stretched out his legs and put his hands on his head. "But remember this, my dear, I took you outer—out of the hospital to keep you from the gutter." Kate's eyes lighted ever so slightly. "For mind me, if Mrs. Haldane had found out all you've told me—and she would have sooner or later—you'd have been outer—out of the hospital an hour afterwards."

Kate looked remarkably like her mother, and Mrs. Horeton always frightened those who saw her angry. Wallsend began to feel frightened, then blustered. "So don't you patronise me with any of your damn pity," he shouted, as he rose and walked unsteadily out of the room. At breakfast next morning Kate had apparently forgiven him. But he was so frightened that he had to get drunk to come home with any courage.

One day his father found him in a city hotel, and brought him home babbling strange things about his wife's past that made the father-in-law's face blanch. Mr. Wallsend, senr., was a highly respectable man, continually before the public as a leading political, commercial, and social light. He was in a state of terror that his son would babble the same things to some scandal-mongering outsiders. He called Kate into the surgery when he arrived, and questioned her. She told him exactly what she had told her husband. When she ended her father-in-law turned to her furiously—

"Curse you, what do you think will become of our name if your identity should be discovered? Do you think it possible for people to believe you told a lie when you publicly admitted a man was your paramour?"

That gleam of concentrated fury came into Kate's eyes which had scared her husband.

"I've not asked anyone to believe it; they can take it or leave it, as they choose, but your son married me with his eyes open."

"Appealing to his sense of honour after entangling him, I expect," said Mr. Wallsend, with a brutal sneer.

"Our word has always been our bond. I never expected it would be our ruin."

"You take me for a political audience, Mr. Wallsend. But do you remember a woman named Helen Massinger? I think her fate has something to do with your word of honour. Perhaps you also remember spurning your daughter from you, as a beggar and a liar."

Wallsend sat down heavily. He was a stout man, and glanced shiftily at the beautiful demon who was showing him what a filthy rag of a soul he possessed.

"You're a politician, and presumably a statesman, with a firm belief in expedients." Kate had been reading political economy of late. "You will find it expedient, in future, never to enter this house again while I am in it, or I shall inform your wife that the sick girl who drew her hair away from your wife's hand contemptuously was your daughter—Elsie's and my husband's half-sister."

"Have you told your husband?"

"No, and I've no intention of doing it unless you provoke me like this again. Now go."

Wallsend, junr., wondered afterwards why his father avoided visiting his home. Then he noticed that Kate ceased visiting every house except Miss Anstey's. It made him suspicious and drink more heavily. Kate never mentioned Jim's name. Miss Anstey rarely mentioned it either, thinking Kate not likely to be interested in an aunt's fond monologues on a nephew's perfections.

One day they saw the news of the wreck in the papers. A fortnight after a letter came from Fiji to say he was recovering, and returning to Melbourne at the first opportunity. Wallsend saw the news in the paper, too.

"You'd better keep away from Miss Anstey's house, as I don't want you to be there when that blackguard of a nephew returns." He spoke sullenly, looking away from her. Kate obeyed him.

A week later Miss Anstey called to see what had become of her. She explained that her husband had forbidden her to go and see her friend. "And of course I must obey him," she added, simply.

Miss Anstey went and turned Kate's face to the light, looking into it anxiously and critically.

"My poor girl," she said at last, putting Kate's face on her breast, and kissing her cheek. Kate only quivered. But Miss Anstey was softly crying when she drove home.

Jim arrived with Johnston the night after his letter, introducing Johnston as the best friend he ever made, or wanted to.

"Except you, mum, of course; but you're more like a mother to me, and that's a darn sight better."

Then he told all about Johnston, till his aunt's eyes were glowing with appreciation of the romance in the situation, and the pleasures of memory. They sat up late, Miss Anstey recounting all incidents she could recall of the friendship between the fathers of Jim and his friend, and of the partnership with Horeton, and found Johnston knew far more about it than she did. As he told Miss Anstey all he knew, she was watching Jim keenly, but covertly. Then she saw, by his apparent lack of interest, that he had made up his mind in some way about "that woman."

Then Miss Anstey told him of the misery of her friend, from whose reticence she knew there was something more than a drunken husband to account for it. Jim listened indifferently, expressing conventional and impersonal regret.

Wallsend saw Jim's arrival by an interview in the evening paper about his wreck. He carefully hid it when he got home. Then, settling to work deliberately to make himself drunk, he taunted his wife almost beyond endurance, but never once mentioned that Jim had returned. He ordered her at last to pull off his boots. Much to his drunken surprise, she obeyed, while he thanked her jeeringly for her new spirit of humility. He understood it in the morning.

When he awakened she was gone.

## CHAPTER XL.

After Mrs. Horeton was taken to the lunatic asylum, Nell and her father settled down outwardly to peace and the blessing of earthly things in abundance. Yet people saw Horeton was greatly changed. Up to recently he had been an active man, alert and clear-eyed, except for a suggestion of furtiveness; but when he did look straight his eyes were bright and interrogative, and generally convinced people he was the last man in the world to be taken down in a deal.

It was after he had got possession of the land that Horeton found honesty paid, and, like a good many men who had been lifted by shady means, he was pitilessly down on others who were dishonest, till, as a J.P., his name became a by-word to petty thieves for severity.

But the trouble fell most heavily on Nell, for which youth and health a little more than compensated. She was often very lonely. Mr. Horeton soon learnt to leave the whole of the domestic management to her. In spite of himself, Horeton began to appreciate the new quiet in his home. Harry he missed painfully, as he had been the object of much hope; but the loss of his petulance and surliness was not so painful, though he would rather have had him back with much worse faults if he could. It was in the absence of his wife that he felt the least pain—why or how it was he could not or would not think. The absence of the other members of his family compelled him to take more notice of Nell, and the same cause made Nell observe her father more closely. Then a new and silent intimacy grew between them. They rarely mentioned Kate or Mrs. Horeton, each knowing the other thought frequently of them, but knowing intuitively that they never thought the same way.

Nell saw, too, that her father had aged; there were times when at the table he would completely forget his food, and sit gazing abstractedly through the window, till Nell reminded him his dinner was getting cold. When

his wife had seen such neglect, she had chided him roughly on the score of economy. Nell did it as if she were sorry he could not eat, for his own sake. He would start eating again with puzzled expression on his face, as if he were trying to remember something. One day the difference struck him, and Nell was surprised to hear him say—

"Yes, yes, my girl, you're very kind to me," and see him glance affectionately at her, as he picked up his knife and fork again.

Week followed week, during which Horeton would go on long walks by himself, coming home tired, to perhaps sleep heavily or lie awake all night, thinking and thinking—but mostly fearing.

Nell never looked at the newspapers; Mary Warren did. She saw in one of the social publications that Smith had gone to the South Seas on a cruise, taking in New Zealand on the voyage. Harriet Nelson—nee Welstrom—was in New Zealand on a holiday. Mary often wrote to her, giving the Boorana news, which once included her version of the break-up of the Horeton household. As it happened, Mrs. Nelson was on the steamer that passed Jim's yacht at the Bluff. As all the steamer's officers knew it, she soon learnt whose yacht it was, and was startled, or, rather, keenly interested, on seeing a red-headed woman on the yacht's deck. She drew her own conclusions as to the woman's identity, and also mentioned them to an interested audience of tourists.

Having to stay in Melbourne a week before returning to Boorana, she found the news too hot to hold. So Mary found her letter rather absorbing—also bitter. She was sure that if Kate had married Smith quietly, the news would have appeared in the matrimonial column. Mary had watched the newspapers, and, seeing nothing, Mrs. Nelson's letter apparently explained everything. Mary said nothing about the letter to her mother, who displayed what seemed to her quite an unworldly belief in Kate's good character. For Nell, Mary had always expressed a keen sympathy, shown to outsiders by pity for Nell at having such a questionable sister as Kate. Nell did not like Mary Warren; but was not so familiar with social conventions as to understand why Mary liked her

in spite of it. She had not resented Mary's belief that Kate had run away with Jim, because she disbelieved it so thoroughly that she did not even think it worth discussing. When Mary had tried to pity Kate, she found the only outlet for sympathy with Nell completely blocked, and was, consequently, angry—rejected sympathy is always humiliating. With Mrs. Nelson's letter in her pocket, and genial smile on her face, Mary walked into Horeton's dining-room unannounced, as was her custom; but was surprised to find Mr. Horeton with Nell. She was too full of her news to let that interfere with her purpose.

"I have news of Kate," she began, looking at Nell, and at Mr. Horeton from the corner of her eye. He turned quickly round.

"What is it, Mary—good or bad?"

"That depends on what you call good or bad; but she's in good health apparently." Nell was looking at Mary with eyes expectantly shining. "Mrs. Nelson saw her in New Zealand."

"What on earth is she doing there?" asked Mr. Horeton.

"I hardly know," said Mary, looking troubled and pitiful.

Nell's face grew white. Mr. Horeton walked over to Mary angrily. He saw that she was hurting Nell, and, taking Mary by the shoulder, he said, roughly—

"If you mention any lie here, I'll put you out of the house."

"You'd better read it for yourself, then," said Mary, handing him Mrs. Nelson's letter, and shaking herself free. Nell watched her father's lips tighten as he read, and his eyebrows contract into an ugly scowl.

"Let me see it," pleaded Nell, when he finished. He handed it to her, after a moment's hesitation, his head drooping wearily, and walked out of the room. Mary watched Nell reading with a smile; it was not a pleasant smile. She thought it was cynically sympathetic; but her face was quite serious when Nell looked up. Then she felt angry, for Nell was smiling indulgently.

"Mrs. Nelson has made a ridiculous mistake," she said.

"Good-bye, Mary; I'm sorry I can't stay. I have to put father right."

Thinking the simplicity of some simpletons beyond sanity, Mary rode away in the frame of mind which in man is vented in weird and painful language.

Nell found her father sitting on a log at the bottom of the garden, very near the spot where she and Kate had had a memorable discussion about Mr. Smith. It flitted into her memory as she walked, and out again when she saw her father's head in his hands. He did not hear her coming, and saw her only when she sank on her knees beside him, and put her arms round his neck.

"It isn't true, father—Mrs. Nelson has made a stupid mistake." He looked at her, and the tears came into her eyes as she saw the misery and fear in his weary face. "Let us find Kate, father. It was the dread of what mother and you would do that sent her away. You know how hard mother was on us when it concerned Harry; and I'm sure Kate does not know mother is—is—ill. And, oh! father, I'm so lonely without her. Every day I expect to hear from her, only to be disappointed. She may be ill—even dying—and we never knowing. She is never what that horrible letter means to say." Nell was crying now.

"Don't cry, little girl—don't cry."

He patted her caressingly, but could say nothing further. Kate's self-damning evidence in the witness-box—what she had said the night before the trial—stood out luridly in his memory. He could not comfort Nell by saying he believed her—and was more pained now, because he could not comfort her, than by Kate's conduct.

"Promise, father, to try and find Kate, and bring her home. Forgive her, if only for my sake." Nell's head fell on his breast, and all her loneliness and longing for Kate was expressed in broken sobbing.

"For your sake, my child, I promise."

They walked back to the house arm in arm, Nell happier than she had been for a long time. Having a definite object in view, Mr. Horeton took up the control of his property in order to make arrangements for going away for an indefinite period. It occupied him nearly six weeks, and just as everything was ready a letter was

brought to him. He recognised Kate's handwriting, and opened it, trembling.

"Forgive me and take me home. What I said in the witness-box was untrue. I am not bad, and cannot explain it all here. I came to Melbourne and entered the hospital. Two months ago I was married. My husband has turned out a drunkard and a brute, so I have left him. At present I am staying with Miss Anstey, and will come away if you will take me home again. For God's sake, father, forgive me and help me now, for I am heart-broken."

Mr. Horeton handed the letter to Nell. In ten minutes she was galloping to the post-office with a telegram.

## CHAPTER XLI.

Miss Anstey, Johnston, and Jim were on the verandah talking when they heard the gate click. Then the figure of a woman in a long cloak showed dimly through the trees in the dark drive.

"It's Mrs. Wallsend. There must be something wrong," said Miss Anstey, and, rising, she went a little way down the drive. Jim listened to the low murmur of their voices; and by his aunt's intonation knew that something was seriously wrong.

"I don't think we'll be wanted in this, Johnston. Come into the library."

A few minutes after they entered, they heard the two ladies enter the drawing-room, which was at the opposite end of the hall. Then Miss Anstey came for Jim.

"She's going to stay with me all night, and in the morning will return to her father—if he'll allow her. Come and I'll introduce you, Jim."

"I suppose that cad, Wallsend, has been playing up, hasn't he, mum?"

"I think so. She has said nothing about it; but I've seen she's been very unhappy for a long time."

"Come on Johnston," said Jim, rising.

"No, thank you; married ladies in distress are not in my line. Anyway, I'm not accustomed to them."

As they passed along the hall Miss Anstey touched the electric button. When they entered the drawing-room, it was aglow with a soft, warm light. Mrs. Wallsend's back was towards them. Jim was observing what a fine figure she had, when, hearing footsteps, Kate turned and faced them.

Jim stood frozeningly still, not even breathing for a moment. Kate's eyes dilated, and she began to tremble.

"Allow me to introduce my nephew," said Miss Anstey; then stood and stared at them.

"I knew you were expected back, Mr. Smith. If I'd known it was so soon, I would not have come."

"His Wealth was Dross."

They hardly heard her voice, it was so low. Jim had imagined his meeting with Kate, had made up his mind exactly what he would say to her. The last idea that entered his mind was her marriage with someone else.

"Why not?" he demanded, mechanically. "Married." The word hammered through his brain with a growing ache.

"Because—because——" She half sat, half fell, into a chair. He turned suddenly to his aunt and said—

"Mum, Mrs. Wallsend was Kate Horeton." A light of understanding came into Miss Anstey's eyes.

"Your poor children," she murmured, turning away. "I'll come back when you call me, Jim." They heard her sigh deeply as she left the room.

"Why didn't you answer my letter?" asked Jim, turning abruptly to Kate.

"What letter?"

"Three days after the trial, I wrote and told you my confession was a lie, asking you to forgive me for it, and marry me." His voice was still harsh. Kate sprang to her feet.

"I never got it," she said, looking searchingly into his eyes. "Say again that your confession was a lie." Suddenly she fell on her knees before him. "Oh, Jim, father turned me out, mother cursed me. I stayed with Mrs. Warren a week, hoping you would come, and left her, thinking you despised me." She bent down in a paroxysm of tears. Jim stooped and placed her in the chair again, and knelt beside her. Looking into her face, he saw all the trouble and disappointment of the last year painted in every beautiful curve, where the maturity of the woman had completely displaced all the girlishness he could remember. He took both her hands in his.

"I can't reproach you, Kate. The terrible fatality that has pursued us so relentlessly prevented my going at once. I had a quarrel with Solomon, and a fight, from which I had to lay up for three days. Not getting an answer to my letter, I went to see Mrs. Warren, who told me you had gone. Then I thought you did not care. I never understood you till I met the son of an old friend of my father. Then I found out that your mother really did want me hanged—when it was too late. I am a man

and a blunderer, Kate. I've blundered in nearly every word I have said to you—everything I have done to you. And I'm not sure even now that I'm not blundering." Kate withdrew one of her hands, and, drawing him gently forward, kised him softly on the forehead. "Tell me how you met that brute, Wallsend, and why you married him."

Kate's eyes flashed.

"He's a liar and a coward, Jim. He lied to me about you always, though I never knew how much till now. He was a student visiting the hospital where I entered as nurse. I found out he had met you, which made me listen to him. But I told him everything before consenting to marry. Now he throws it up at me, and has ordered me not to come here. But to-night he taunted me beyond endurance about you."

"The hound!" stormed Jim, and rising. "I thrashed him once for taunting me about you. I wish I'd killed him."

Kate remembered her husband's explanation of his black eye.

"I almost wish you had, too," she said, bitterly.

Jim walked to the end of the room, and, coming back, he stopped suddenly in front of her.

"Kate, will you come away with me?" She looked up frghtenedly. "Anywhere away from that brute." She rose and clung to him pleadingly.

"Jim! Jim! don't ask me to do that. Think of your aunt, of your future." He felt she wanted to come, and was fighting herself—heard it in her short gasping breath. He held her tightly to him, his heart beating wildly, trying hard to think clearly, blindly struggling with an almost irresistible something in himself, which urged him to throw every consideration to the winds except his desire. When the first fierce blaze of his passion exhausted itself, he began to think of ways and means, still shutting his eyes to consequences, and he began to plead with her. She still clung to him, softly crying, but silently resisting. He led her to the sofa, and, sitting beside her, painted all the misery she would inevitably suffer mated to such a man as Wallsend. She knew it better than he did.

"We've both blundered, Kate. The blame is mainly

mine, as I knew more. But regrets are useless, and nothing we can do now will make us more unhappy than we are." He looked hungrily into her eyes. She wanted to argue against him, but knew it would be worse than useless, for all her feelings were against refusal.

But something deeper than expedient had been fighting against Jim—fighting him against the powerful inclination of her passion. At last she said—

"If it lay with my love for you only, Jim, I would go with you now. But I dare not." She bent her face forward till it was almost invisible. Jim stared at her blankly for a moment; then, bending down, he scanned her face closely—and understood.

The most intense mental agony in a soul-racking jealousy took possession of him. Kate saw it begin to work in his whitening face, and watched him with fear-dilating eyes, shrinking from him. She thought he would kill her, or, worse still, kill himself. He sprang from the sofa, and began erratically pacing the room. Putting his hand in his pocket as if in search of a weapon, he felt his pipe and matches, and pitched them fiercely into the hearth, his hand clenching convulsively, his features betraying an animal-like ferocity. The misery of it went to the very roots of his being, and gnawed savagely. It was primitive love hunger, as intense at bottom as food hunger. He was starving, and with a starving man's instinctive, uncontrollable disregard of all convention and law, the smallest opportunity would have upset his mental balance, and made him anything the opportunity presented. But, glancing at Kate, he saw she understood what was working in him as completely as he did; but in her he saw also a passion as primitive and even fiercer than his own. Herself she had completely forgotten, but was looking tigerishly wary. Her passion was that of a mother.

In those few moments they lived a whole life-time. It was an impasse of strong wills, in which the woman's was the stronger. But it left them both exhausted. Steadily and gradually Jim looked less and less like an animal, till he was a thinking and reasoning man once more. Then he sat beside Kate again, and took her hand.

"You're right, Kate. But if your father refuses to take you back, will you come with me?"

"Yes," she answered. But he knew it was because she felt her father would not refuse.

Jim called his aunt. She glanced at them with an unspoken question.

"Thank God! I see you're going to do nothing foolish," she said, fervently, and kissed them both.

"I wish you could have said that a year ago, mum," said Jim, and left them.

Next morning the telegram arrived from Nell.

## CHAPTER XLII.

Kate still felt the effects of her meeting with Jim when she arrived at Boorana late in the following afternoon. Mr. Horeton and Nell saw them, too, and led her from the train with scarcely a greeting; but in the buggy Nell took her hand under the rug, and pressed it silently, while her father stolidly drove.

"How is mother?" asked Kate, when they were a little way along the road.

"Don't you know? Oh! I forgot," said Nell.

"She isn't—isn't dead?" asked Kate, with a catch in her voice.

"Wait till we get home," said Nell, glancing significantly at her father. Kate looked at him, too. His shoulders were more bent, his hair thinner and whiter, and the part of his cheek she could see was loose-skinned and more wrinkled. Even in Nell there was a change. Sorrow had changed them all.

Rounding a curve in the road, they came in sight of Table Hill. Kate shuddered. Nell and her father had their feelings dulled by familiarity with it; but, glancing quickly at Kate, Nell glanced more quickly away again. They arrived at the creek, and travelled beside it till in sight of the gate. Jack, the stockman, was waiting to open it. In spite of the ugly rumours, the sight of Kate brought all his old admiration for her to the surface, which shone plainly from his eyes as he took her outstretched hand.

"Welcome home again, Miss Kitty," was all he said, and Kate's eyes grew moist. He rode beside the buggy, telling her all about the horses and other animals—the old familiar things that had once made all her world. He was talking as much to keep her from attempting to reply, which was beyond her, till they crossed one of the creeks by its ricketty wooden bridge, and came suddenly in sight of the homestead from behind a patch of timber. Its low verandahs were covered with the tender

green of the new vine shoots, its squat roof spreading wide over the dull, granite walls, looking strangely the same, and strangely different, like a house built to shelter generations of Horetons—and already heirless.

When he stepped out of the buggy, Mr. Horeton held out his hand to Kate.

"You need never leave us again," he said, sadly, and, stooping, clumsily kissed her. During the meal that almost immediately followed, both he and Kate were constrained and awkward, dreading the interview which was to follow.

It is not often a father hears from his child the full explanation of his own and his family's misfortunes, and less often does he clearly recognise that he alone is primarily to blame. Kate related everything she had done herself, every interview she had had with her mother, speaking without any trace of bitterness or anger, as if she were speaking of some other person than herself. But when Mr. Horeton heard how his wife had threatened and cajoled, and in both cases cursed, he shivered violently. He had never understood his wife, nor could he understand her now. Beneath the story he recognised that Kate was the inevitable product of her childish training, the result of neglect and ignorance, to which he had directly contributed, though at the same time understanding that under slightly different circumstances the result might have been different. It was the slight thing that he had neglected to contribute. Through Kate's story he also saw the cause of the ruin of Harry's nature —saw his son for what he really had been, a passionate and blindly selfish man.

When Kate came to the events of her relations with Smith, he understood them more fully than she, and wondered bitterly at his and his wife's blindness in not seeing that his girls had ceased to be children—that they had grown into women, with women's hopes and feelings. Little things came swiftly back to his memory. The dismissal of the stable-boy was one of them—full of significance now, unseen or misunderstood then. His greatest shock was on learning how Harry had been used as a tool to get his mother into giving the tennis party and the ball.

But it was when Kate told him that Jim had been as ignorant of his quarrel with Mr. Smith as herself that the veil fell finally from his eyes, and everything that had happened from Jim's arrival to that moment slipped into its proper place, like the pieces in a puzzle pattern. He remembered his wife's suggestion that Smith might marry one of her girls, and protect her parents from—what? The answer crushed him. Their very fears had created all the circumstances through which the thing they most dreaded had occurred. Again the familiar words rang through his ears—"Justice. Justice. It is just."

Mr. Horeton was not a religious man, though he had religious ideas that were part of his mental habit, and were as primitive as an aborigine's. He was superstitious. Anthropology suggests that superstition is religion in the chrysalis stage. But civilisation had made him moral enough to be something more than purely superstitious. When Kate's story ended, every vestige of superstition fell away from him. What he had thought bad luck became what it really was—cause and effect. Everything that had happened was perfectly logical, the necessary consequence of what he had himself done, or left undone, of the conduct in which his wife had aided and abetted him—even in the swindling his partners—through her blind devotion to the material welfare of her son. But the bitterest part of it was recognising that in considering the material side, he had completely wrecked the moral side of his son, and involved the innocent. Harry dead, Kate with a dishonoured name, Nell without a friend, his wife in a lunatic asylum—his wealth was dross.

Men looked up to him with respect because he was successful, and he had believed that wealth was all a man needed for content. They would still look up to him for his success—and he lay grovelling in the dust of self-abasement. It took the temper out of the spring of his life. He was too old to re-temper it; but not too old to suffer. Kate saw the pain, half in wonder, half in fear; then with pity. Mercifully, perhaps, she was saved by her youth from fully understanding her father's heart in that awful moment. He sat with his hands hanging limply between his knees, his face old and grey, with an

irretrievable sorrow that time itself could not lessen, which dulling faculties alone might mitigate.

Their silence at last attracted Nell, who ran in to her father, and stood over him protectingly, looking half angrily at Kate. She slipped on to her knees before him.

"I'm so sorry, father," was all she could say.

"I hope you'll both forgive me some day," was all he could reply.

. . . . . .

In the morning Kate was awakened by the carolling of the magpies and the laughing of the jackasses; while the sunlight, pouring through the window, brought on its beams a gush of memory, sad, but with a touch of pleasure in the sadness. Dressing, she went on to the verandah, and took in deep breaths of the eucalyptus-laden air, and gazed at the friendly landmarks. Once the country was just trees and hills to her, but every tree and hill had now its memory and meaning, recalling some childish pleasure, some act without consequence at the time, yet each a link in the chain connecting her with the present. Her face saddened. Freedom was only a word. Circumstances were stronger than her will, and were still to force her on the path in life they made—ever questioning and rebelling, ever trying to form it for herself.

She wandered about the house and yards, arm and arm with Nell, who alone seemed content merely from her sister's presence, though at times melancholy, as she related to Kate what had happened in her absence. In spite of her intention to be submissive to her mother, Kate felt that the home would be more peaceful from her absence. Though he did not betray it, Mr. Horeton thought the same.

Report soon had it that Kate had returned, and, of course, the simple-minded inhabitants of Boorana were much puzzled, for they were quite cognisant of the fact that Kate had been forbidden her father's door. That is enough to puzzle the simplest mind. Mary Warren heard the news with open pleasure and secret disappointment. The pleasure was on learning that she was not Mrs. James Smith, the disappointment that she was legally Mrs. Wallsend. It was a reflection on her opinion of Kate. But it did not prevent her calling with her mother. Mrs.

Warren hardly spoke to her during the drive, and wore an expression now familiar to Mary, but which always irritated her.

Kate took Mrs. Warren wholly into her confidence, who nearly cried with vexation, and chided her bitterly for so cutting herself off from her friends, in particular herself. But when Kate mentioned her condition, Mrs. Warren's anger vanished instantly. It was then Kate fully realised what a wise mother would have been to her.

Mary found Kate alone during the afternoon.

"Did you meet Mr. Smith while in Melbourne, Kate?" she asked. Kate looked at her with almost childish innocence.

"For about an hour in his aunt's place the night before I returned."

"He's grown indifferent because she's married," thought Mary. Then the vindictive side of her came out, for since the news of Kate's marriage, Mary had realised Kate could not have received Jim's letter. She took it from her purse and handed it to Kate.

"I found it a few days after you left, flying about the stable-yard," she explained.

"Open?" asked Kate, carelessly. Mary flushed and nodded.

"Did you show it to anyone else?"

"No; I kept it to return to you."

"For the pleasure it would give me," she said, quietly, and putting it in her pocket unread. "Mr. Smith told me what he had written at his aunt's," she said, coldly. Mary saw Kate had learnt unsuspected things since she had been to the city. Going inside, she called Nell and her father. When they read the letter, Nell remembered its coming.

"Mother must have read it that—that night, father," said Nell.

Then he knew why his wife had lost her reason.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

In writing her despairing letter to her father, and saying her heart was broken, Kate had used a popular method of stating a psychological fact. Men indicate the same state when they take to drink, or to the recklessness which is moral suicide, and often looks like courage. Both these things were impossible to Kate, which left her free to brood. She attempted to be cheerful—she could not be idle—for the sake of Nell and her father. But the effort was a sorry one. Mrs. Warren, more or less rightly, ascribed her mental state to her physical condition, and watched over her carefully, and tried to keep her from gloomy ideas. She had an old-fashioned idea that a mother's mental state is reproduced in the child afterwards, and for the same reason Kate tried to help her. But the feeling that she was the helpless puppet of an inexorable fate overshadowed her brightest moments. There was nobody to direct her untrained heart, to tell her that pain was a means to an end, and disappointment a different degree of pain. But either kills if unmodified by periods of mitigation. In the failure of her marriage Kate saw no hope of mitigation. Every step she had taken had been a wrong one. Desiring nothing beyond simple domestic pleasures, she might eventually have been at least content with her husband. Deprived of that hope, she believed she had lost everything.

As the passing weeks brought her confinement nearer, Mrs. Warren, Nell, and her father watched her sinking before their eyes. Horeton called in the doctor, telling him all he did not know. It is little of the secret pain and sorrow that a country doctor fails to hear. He gave her a tonic, but sadly indicated that her case was not within the power of his drugs.

The baby was a boy. Kate rallied for a time under the stimulus of maternity. Then a careless remark on heredity from the doctor set her thinking that her boy would

grow up like his father. She turned her face wearily to the wall. The doctor found her temperature up and down, and he became anxious. Nell scarcely left her side, finding in the baby a source of perpetual wonder.

One day Kate turned on her side, and watched the child thoughtfully for a long time. The mystery of the little twitching mite was puzzling her deeply. Her father came in and quietly sat beside her. Suddenly Kate looked up, and said eagerly—

"Father, send for mother."

They brought Mrs. Horeton home the next day. Kate watched her, half fearfully, half expectantly, as they led her to the bedside. But her eyes were vacant, and looked unseeingly at her daughter. Kate raised the child from her side, which gave a slight whimper. Mrs. Horeton quivered, and her eyes lost their vacancy. The child wailed. She moved a quick step nearer and bent down. The baby's hand jumped, and its little pink fist softly punched the old woman's cheek. Her arms stretched out, her eyes lit with longing. Kate placed the child in her extended arms.

"Little Harry," she murmured. "Little Harry, you've come back to me."

She never remembered the events of the past year. In everything else she eventually recovered her faculties; but was a changed woman. From that moment Kate seemed more cheerful. Then she steadily recovered her desire to live. With it came fear of death. But she felt very near death, and made one more request.

"Send for Mr. Smith, father," she pleaded, one day.

. . . . . .

In the morning a light north wind was blowing; in its breath was the odour of dry grass and warm dust; and when a mob of sheep passed it left behind the strong smell of the wool yolk. Kate shut her eyes, and let each familiar scene carry her back to the careless days of her childhood. The wind rose, and Nell came in to shut the window. Kate asked her to leave it open, and to place her in a big arm-chair, where she could see the sunlit paddocks. Nell obeyed eagerly and wondering, for it was the first time since the birth of her child she had sat up. The wind rose to a strong breeze, and tossed the branches

till they surged like the sea, and threw out showers of leaves, followed by strings of bark from the trunks; while lines of thistle down streamed across the paddock like living snow. A passing cart on the distant road left behind a cloud of dust that poured over the fence, to lose itself in the dry grass and dead timber. The sun blinds tugged wildly at their cordage, and flapped against the posts in the strenuous effort to be free; then a cane verandah chair rolled over, and was sent scraping along the boards foolishly. Kate's eyes brightened. On such another day she had felt the vague stirrings of awakening womanhood—a vague feeling of mysterious elation, which had sent her racing over the hills, hand in hand with Nell, laughing and singing in inexplicable joy. Life was so good then, coming clearly on the wild rushes of the wind, which tossed their hair and clothes about their slim bodies, and made them tingle.

Nell came in and leant on the arm of the chair, and smilingly watched the dreamy elation in Kate's eyes, which looked large and unearthly in her thin and wasted face. Suddenly a tinge of warm colour spread over it.

Looking out, Nell saw a horseman galloping along the road, bent low over the saddle, his coat tails flying in the wind. Nell's eyes softened—and saddened. In a few moments Jim dismounted at the end of the verandah, and they heard him striding quickly along. Coming opposite the window he stopped. A world of deep pity showed in his expression. He saw why Kate had sent for him. Nell crept quietly out of the room.

"You cannot leave us, Kate," he said stepping in, and bending down beside her.

"I have no longer anything worth living for."

"Yes, you have—your father, Nell, and your boy. What would he do without you?"

"And you, Jim."

"Because of the boy I no longer count."

"The loss of you has taken the desire to live from me."

"We've been looking at things the wrong way, Kate." She glanced at him questioningly. "I thought only of myself when I asked you to come away with me. Who were you thinking of when you refused?"

"Oh! the boy."

"Who are you thinking of now?" She hung her head. "He is not less worth living for now that he is born."

"I'm grown selfish, Jim. Yet once or twice of late I have thought there might be something better than ourselves. But every way I've looked there seems nothing to hope for; not even in the boy. I heard the doctor say something about heredity; that he would be like his father."

"He will also be like his mother," said Jim. "Besides, his father was made what he is, and that is not hereditary."

A tinge of hope lightened Kate's sorrow. Then she remembered the little hospital patient, her instinctive purity of thought and feeling, and told Jim about her.

"We all feel like her, but we don't know enough to act up to it, until sometimes too late," said Jim. Kate quivered.

"You will forgive everything I did to you, Jim?"

"Kate! Kate! What is there to forgive when there is neither forgiving nor forgetting in it. We did not know. Your mother did not know, nor your father. We all blundered through ignorance of things and ourselves. Your marriage was a blunder, but has brought you something you can never neglect, and which came between us once, to save us from the worst blunder of the lot."

"I think you're right, Jim. Have you seen Wallsend lately?"

"Yes; he can't last much longer. His father has taken charge of him till the end." Kate looked at him directly.

"And afterwards?"

"It will make no difference," he said.

"You are right, Jim; the child has come between us for ever."

The wind whistled round the corners of the house, the blinds tugged and flapped, and the trees roared like waves beating on a rocky shore. Kate's head sank back on to the pillow, her eyes half closed. Then opened as her mother, with the baby in her arms, passed along the lower end of the garden. Mrs. Horeton was bending lovingly over the boy, struggling with some wrappings which the wind in vain tried to tear from the sleeping child.

Jim saw a subtle change come into Kate's features. It was as if an invisible hand had lightly touched each one of them, softening every harsh curve, painting out the lines of weary fretfulness steadily, and beautifully, till all its old beauty returned, softened and strengthened, in a wonderful peace.

"I'll live, Jim. Marry Nell, she loves you—and knows."

Then she slept.

And they had found themselves.

THE END.

UNIVERSITY OF [illegible] LIBRARY

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

NON-RENEWABLE

ILL-CDU

DEC 29 1994

DUE 2 WKS FROM DATE RECEIVED

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 558 369 5

Un